



EDITED BY  
**PHILLIP  
MITSIS**

≡ The Oxford Handbook of  
**EPICURUS AND  
EPICUREANISM**



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*For David Konstan and David Sider*

*Γέλᾱν ἅμα δεῖ καὶ φιλοσοφεῖν ...*

# CONTENTS

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## *List of Contributors*

Introductory remarks

PHILLIP MITSIS

## **PART I EPICURUS**

### 1. Epicurus and the Epicurean School

TIZIANO DORANDI

### 2. Epistemology

GISELA STRIKER

### 3. Atomism

DAVID KONSTAN

### 4. Cosmology and Meteorology

DARYN LEHOUX

### 5. Theology

EMIDIO SPINELLI AND FRANCESCO VERDE

### 6. Death

STEPHEN E. ROSENBAUM

### 7. Hedonism

VOULA TSOUNA

8. Psychology  
ELIZABETH ASMIS
9. Voluntary Action and Responsibility  
WALTER ENGLERT
10. Friendship  
PHILLIP MITSIS
11. Politics and Society  
GEERT ROSKAM
12. Language  
ENRICO PIERGIACOMI
13. Rhetoric  
CLIVE CHANDLER
14. Poetics  
MICHAEL MCOSKER

## **PART II ANCIENT EPICUREANISM AND ITS CRITICS**

15. Philodemus and the Herculaneum Papyri  
MARIO CAPASSO
16. Lucretius  
MONICA R. GALE
17. Horace and Vergil  
GREGSON DAVIS
18. Cicero  
CARLOS LÉVY
19. Seneca and Epicurus  
MARGARET GRAVER



- 20. Plutarch  
MICHAEL ERLER
- 21. Diogenes of Oenoanda  
PAMELA GORDON
- 22. Epicurus and Epicureanism in Rabbinic Literature, Maimonides, and  
Rabbi Nachman of Breslov  
GABRIEL DANZIG
- 23. Early Christianity  
ILARIA RAMELLI

## **PART III EARLY MODERN AND LATER RECEPTION**

- 24. Humanist Dissemination of Epicureanism  
ADA PALMER
- 25. Materialism and the Early Modern “Natural History of Man”  
ANN THOMSON
- 26. Early Modern Epicureanism: Gassendi and Hobbes in Dialogue on  
Psychology, Ethics, and Politics  
GIANNI PAGANINI
- 27. Epicurus in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Thought: A  
“Freedom of Pleasures”?  
THOMAS M. KAVANAGH
- 28. Thomas Jefferson  
CARL J. RICHARD
- 29. Epicureanism and Utilitarianism  
A. A. LONG
- 30. Epicurus in Nineteenth-Century Germany: Hegel, Marx, and  
Nietzsche

JAMES I. PORTER

31. Postmodernism

EVA MARIE NOLLER AND W. H. SHEARIN

*Index*

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

.....

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# INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

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PHILLIP MITSIS

FIFTY years ago, when the recent resurgence of Epicurean scholarship was in its infancy, it was fairly typical for scholars to begin with a few plangent observations about the neglect of Epicurus along, perhaps, with a dark glance at the baleful influence on histories of ancient philosophy exerted by Hegel, who had been brutally dismissive of Epicureanism ([Chapter 30](#)). A few would give the occasional brave nod in the direction of Epicurean arguments that seemed to speak to current developments in philosophy at the time, but overall it was hard to miss an underlying subtext of occasional defensiveness mixed with some slightly sheepish boosterism. Today, the situation is markedly different both within and outside the Academy. Introductory ancient philosophy courses, which invariably used to conclude with Aristotle, now regularly make plenty of room for Hellenistic philosophers, and graduate programs are awash in seminars devoted not only to Epicureans, but also to their rivals, the Stoics and Sceptics. Meanwhile, contemporary philosophers continue to churn out article after article of increasing sophistication defending or (mostly) attempting to refute Epicurus's arguments about the harmlessness of death ([Chapter 7](#)). Indeed, it is hard to think of another set of ancient philosophical arguments that has created such an argumentative frenzy.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the sheer bulk of scholarly production, however, the number of clubs, blogs, and self-help groups devoted to Epicureanism continues to

explode. Indeed, I imagine many professional scholars may sometimes feel that their contributions somehow lack the immediate visceral appeal of those flashier productions of true believers touting Epicureanism as a cure for everything from one's romantic troubles to climate change. Yet, though it is doubtful that many of the scholars in this volume write as believers, nonetheless they have come together with a strong conviction, no longer needing much defense, about the intrinsic interest of Epicurus's philosophy and the historical significance of its subsequent widespread influence. In short, it has been a very good half-century for Epicurus and Epicureanism.

This recognition of Epicurus's importance is not so distant, however, that the volume has not been able to include many of the scholars who were among the first solitary pioneers to publish important work on Epicureanism, and it is a special pleasure to note that not only have they retained their interest over the decades, but they also are now in the position to reflect first hand on the various trajectories of scholarship that many of them helped to inaugurate. At the same time, however, the volume has attempted to give voice to approaches and issues that are newly coming to the fore, especially in the reception of Epicureanism. It is here that scholarship has most recently taken flight in so many areas and disciplines that the volume has at best been able to try to outline only some of the major developments and connections that a new generation of scholars is exploring in greater depth. Even as this volume goes to press, new studies are appearing about Epicurus's influence on figures as diverse as Omar Khayyam, Shakespeare, Shelley, Foucault, etc., and this appears to be just the tip of the iceberg.

In many ways, Epicureanism presents a distinct case among the ancient philosophical schools. One reason is because our knowledge of it is continually being enriched by new evidence in a way that distinguishes it from the rest of its ancient competitors. Whereas most ancient philosophical texts have come down to us from medieval manuscripts that have been copied from generation to generation, with all the problems attendant on that process, in the 1750s a treasure-trove of some eight hundred papyrus rolls was excavated in Herculaneum, many of which offer direct and often unprecedented kinds of evidence about ancient Epicureanism and its practices and arguments. These had been buried in the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE and were the first full papyrus books to come to light in Europe. Unfortunately they also had been carbonized and, accordingly, nearly

impossible to unroll initially without inflicting grave damage upon them. One recent source of considerable excitement in the world of ancient philosophy, however, has been the development of new techniques that are giving us much better glimpses into a large number of these works by Philodemus, an Epicurean of the first century BCE. Philodemus ([Chapter 15](#)) cannot claim to be an especially original philosopher, but his works show us a later Epicurean, no doubt partially under the influence of his own teachers, trying to work out and adapt the doctrines of Epicurus and the earlier founders of the school to the demands of his own intellectual and cultural milieu hundreds of years later. By the same token, his approach to the liberal arts generally and especially to rhetoric ([Chapter 13](#)) and to poetry ([Chapter 14](#)) appears to develop lines of argument that were either missing among earlier Epicureans or perhaps treated by them in more deflationary ways. In any case, the variety and amount of this new material coming to light from Herculaneum gives Epicureanism a special kind of purchase on our scholarly attention.

A second distinctive source of evidence is perhaps among the strangest and most impressive productions of the ancient philosophical world ([Chapter 21](#)). In the city of Oenoanda in ancient Lycia, a Greek Epicurean in the second century CE had a summary of Epicureanism of approximately 25,000 words carved onto the limestone walls of a public portico. This is the most massive inscription surviving from Greco-Roman antiquity and thus far hardly a third of it has been uncovered. Diogenes of Oenoanda, as he has come to be called, set up this philosophical porch in order to make available the saving message of Epicurus for “people from the entire earth,” regardless of country. Many of these texts have no exact parallel elsewhere and again, as they slowly come to be published and studied, they offer refinements, developments, and intriguing philosophical divergences from our other sources of textual evidence. They also help to illuminate the public face of Epicureanism in this period and to begin clarifying the nature of Diogenes’s audacious and enterprising attempt to present Epicurus’s message to a cosmopolitan audience as a kind of monumental public performance. Readers will quickly notice how many of the volume’s chapters show the growing influence of Philodemus’s and Diogenes’s texts on the overall interpretation and understanding both of Epicurus’s thought and of the kinds of tensions and possibilities for development that later thinkers were able to divine in his original doctrines.

It is perhaps worth briefly mentioning here a related feature of Epicureanism that may not be immediately obvious as one turns to individual chapters, but is often lurking somewhere in the background. Epicureanism was alone among the ancient philosophical schools in being able to maintain, along with a coherent philosophical identity, a stable, continuing physical presence in Athens during its first few centuries of existence. In the past, this has sometimes led to extreme views in the scholarship about the doctrinal conservatism of Epicureans in this initial period and also about the clubby tone of both their thought and communal life in Athens and elsewhere. The volume begins with a detailed exploration of not only the evidence for Epicurus's life, but also for the relations of leading figures in the school down to the first century BCE. It has become fairly clear that scattered among periods of intellectual harmony and cohesion were individual outbreaks of apostasy and dissidence that sometimes prefigure later divergent manifestations of Epicureanism. This is an important corrective to some outmoded views about the doctrinal rigidity of Epicureans<sup>2</sup> and it seems that Epicureanism quickly was able to take on forms with sufficient plasticity to put one in mind, for example, of the many varieties that Christianity has taken through the ages. Indeed, one of these later manifestations arising from their intersection—"Christian Epicureanism"—would seem to illustrate well the surprising flexibility of both ([Chapters 25, 26, 28](#)). Such a view of the malleability of Epicureanism also helps prepare us to see how it was possible not just for generations of philosophers, but also for great poets like Lucretius ([Chapter 16](#)), Vergil and Horace ([Chapter 17](#)), and even a statesman like Thomas Jefferson ([Chapter 28](#)) to find in their own diverse times, places, and intellectual contexts helpful models in Epicureanism for addressing their own and their publics' most pressing questions. The notion of the blinkered doctrinal fundamentalism of Epicureans had been entrenched for so long in the scholarship, however, that it is worth bearing in mind that, while many scholars have moved on, others have still felt the need, given the nature of the volume, to spend some time acknowledging and then exorcising its phantoms.

Turning to questions of Epicurus's philosophy itself, one of the most striking features of Hellenistic philosophy, which is shared by Epicureanism, is a drive for a systematic understanding of all aspects of the world and a confidence that not only can one come to understand its basic

principles, but that such understanding will lead one to individual happiness ([Chapter 16](#)). Unlike much of contemporary philosophy which has been carved up into various specialisms and whose practitioners are increasingly reluctant to wander into the domains of their departmental neighbors down the hall, Epicurus, with a kind of enviably insouciant innocence, claims to be able show how his views of theology, the physical world, epistemology, psychology, ethics, and so on form a coherent, intelligible whole. Not all scholars have agreed that the joins he sees between his various arguments in these disciplines are as tightly fitted as he hopes, but nonetheless one of the abiding interests of his philosophy is his attempt to see the forest for the trees—which apart from its own intrinsic interest, serves, perhaps, as a potent reminder of some of the original larger goals of philosophy over and above an aloof pride in its own professional dexterity.

The volume is divided into roughly three sections. After an introduction to Epicurus's life and the history of the school in antiquity, it turns to Epicurus's philosophy per se and offers a comprehensive analysis of all of its major areas. The next nine chapters, beginning with Philodemus, look at the expanding role of Epicureanism in the Roman era and has chapters devoted not only to more straightforward advocates and critics, but also shows various transformations of Epicureanism in poetry and cultural life generally. The story picks up again with the Renaissance, and the last third of the volume sketches more broadly the many forms of Epicurean influence on European thought ever since. Contributors have carefully balanced, it is hoped, strongly held individual views with a wider survey of the overall scholarly terrain. Occasionally some topics that might have formed unified contributions have been shared across different sections of the volume, though this has been signposted in the notes. Mostly this had to be done to avoid repetition, but also a decision was made that aspects of some topics might be more judiciously handled in different argumentative contexts. So, for instance, Epicurus's notion of justice as being a contract not to harm or be harmed became one of his most lasting and influential contributions to Western legal and philosophy. At the same time, though, Epicureans have important discussions of justice in relation to friendship, as an individual virtue of character instrumental to personal happiness and tranquility, and also as an initial step grounding the origins of social and political life. To treat all of these different aspects of Epicurus's account together in a single contribution devoted to Epicurean justice would have

meant going through a lot of the same material in a volume that is not particularly distinguished by its slenderness. Thus, justice as a contract is treated in detail in [Chapter 26](#) in the context of Gassendi's and Hobbes's detailed discussions of contractual justice and the nature of law. There one can arguably see Epicurus's original theory to better effect alongside its subsequent transformations by two of its key early modern philosophical proponents. The relation of justice and friendship and the conception of justice as an individual virtue of character is treated in [Chapter 10](#), which takes up questions of the nature and scope of relations of friendship and, thus, the extent to which Epicurus's conceptions of friendship and justice overlap. Finally, justice in the context of the Epicurean psychological and anthropological account of the origins of social groups finds a natural place in a fuller account of Epicurean social and political theory in [Chapter 11](#). It is hoped that these kinds of division of labor do not prove too unwieldy, but at the same time, they in some sense reflect the systematic nature and range of Epicurean discussions and the extent to which they often spill over what Epicurus would take to be artificial boundaries. At the same time, in this particular case for instance, one might be left wondering, say, how justice as a contract is compatible with justice being a personal virtue. In general, contributors have been urged to note such questions in their individual contributions where relevant, but also to point readers to more detailed and unified discussions of such individual problems in the scholarly literature.

In turning to the presentation of Epicurus's philosophy, he is reported to have said that the best entry into his system of thought was through his theology ([Chapter 5](#)), though Epicureans were not particularly dogmatic about a best starting point. In retrospect, this claim seems slightly incongruous, given how many misunderstandings, many of them willful, his theological views have been subject to through the ages, especially by Judaism ([Chapter 22](#)) and Christianity ([Chapter 23](#)). Given the Epicureans' flexibility on the question of starting points, the volume has followed a different order, however, and begins the discussion of Epicurus's philosophy proper with his epistemological arguments ([Chapter 2](#)). This is not entirely arbitrary since as he was writing, philosophers were becoming more and more self-conscious about providing an epistemological grounding or criterion of truth for their claims about natural philosophy and the rest of their systems, and there is some evidence that Epicurus was sympathetic to such a methodological procedure or, perhaps, even



responsible for inaugurating it. This attempt to establish how it is that philosophers or natural scientists can demonstrate the truth of their theories arose partly in response to sceptical arguments about the unreliability of the senses that had been part and parcel of earlier Greek atomism. Epicurus argued that the senses provide the basis for truth by passively receiving information without altering it and thus providing us with reliable content. We can fall into error, however, by making false judgments about this content. My senses may be reliably reporting, for instance, that the oar looks bent in water and it does. But I make a mistake by inferring from this that the oar itself is bent, since by collecting more evidence from my senses I would be able to come to the correct judgment that the oar is not bent, but only appears so in the water because of the way it is refracting light. Without relying on my senses, however, I could never accumulate the evidence needed to make the correct judgment. Our mental preconceptions (*prolepseis*), which arise empirically through experience, give us a basis for making such correct judgments. Epicureans further bolstered this claim with an extensionalist theory of language ([Chapter 12](#)) grounded in its empirical acquisition. Epicureans' strongly empirical claims about the acquisition and justification of knowledge were to strongly resonate with later empiricist philosophers, especially those who linked their claims to a particular scientific materialist view of the world ([Chapters 25, 30](#)). By the same token, the Epicureans developed a scientific methodology based on inferences from preconceptions and "what underlies words" to justify their theories about entities that are not directly open to observation, such as atoms and certain cosmological phenomena.

In turning to Epicurus's atomism ([Chapter 3](#)) we are confronted with an interesting historical irony. On the one hand, the importance of his theory for the development of early modern atomism seems beyond question and he is often, rightly, taken to be an influential figure in the formation of classical atomic theory ([Chapter 25](#)). Yet, at the same time many of his views, such as the indeterminate swerve of atoms, were thought to be aberrations, even by such early advocates of his atomism as Gassendi. Thus, although often seen as a champion of modern atomism, Epicurus in some sense can also be viewed as a champion of what might be characterized as post-modern atomism (and logic) to the extent that he grapples with philosophical issues that parallel contemporary worries in quantum theory ([Chapter 31](#)).

Epicurus argues that both space and time are quantized and that the universe consists of material atoms that travel at a uniform velocity of one minimum of space per minimum of time. He bolstered his theory with a series of sophisticated and remarkably prescient claims about the quantity of different kinds of atoms and underlying mathematics of their movements. Moreover, his views about the systematic nature of philosophy led him directly to worry about the relation of indeterminate atomic events to voluntary human action and responsibility ([Chapter 9](#)), in a way different from the majority of contemporary philosophers who attempt to analyze the nature of free will while bracketing questions about the causal connections between atomic events and human action. One intriguing issue hanging over contemporary accounts of free will is Epicurus's question of how free, seemingly rational human decisions can arise out of a material world structured by random quantum events.

Atoms, of course, are not directly perceptible, so Epicureans needed to develop a series of methodological procedures for justifying their claims about them. They faced a series of corresponding problems explaining cosmological, astronomical, and meteorological phenomena that were likewise beyond immediate perception ([Chapter 4](#)). Again, with respect to their cosmological views the Epicureans were outliers, since unlike most of their philosophical rivals, they denied that the cosmos was both finite and spherical and they also held that there were multiple worlds. They sometimes used the latter claim to bolster their argument for the existence of multiple explanations for certain phenomena for which there is inadequate empirical confirmation. Even if we can eliminate a competing explanation in our world, there may be equi-probable explanations in other worlds, thus multiple explanations may exist across multiple possible worlds. Interestingly, the Epicureans linked this notion of multiple explanations, which has sometimes been used by modern scientists as a working method for aiding in the formulation of strong inference, for ethical purposes and to eliminate the fear of certain phenomena. The verdict seems to be out at the moment about the potential benefits of multiple workable hypotheses in scientific discovery, so opinions differ about whether Epicurus's move to such instrumental ethical benefits may have been too quick and hence a lost opportunity. But again, he reminds us of the potential ethical dimensions of our scientific methodologies and their ethical and social costs.

Clearly, one place where someone might push the Epicureans' theory is on the question of why they are so confident that some of their views, for instance in atomism and in theology, are not similarly susceptible of multiple explanations. The threat to their atomist theology seems especially strong, as Seneca ([Chapter 19](#)) was to insist in defending the providential and teleological views of Stoicism. But Epicureans were adamant in maintaining their view of anthropomorphic gods that are physically incorruptible, live in a state of psychic blessedness, and have absolutely no concern for human beings. This latter claim opened them to the charge of atheism from early on, and along with their denial of the immortality of the soul ([Chapter 6](#)), was a key reason why, unlike Aristotle and Plato, Epicureanism seems to have completely disappeared from the Islamic and Byzantine philosophical traditions. Interestingly, Epicurus held up the life of the gods as an ethical model in many areas of his philosophy (e.g. friendship, [Chapter 10](#)) and insisted that mortals can aspire to similar states of untroubled blessedness ([Chapter 8](#)), all the while emphasizing our mortality and the fact that after our deaths we will be nothing. [Chapter 7](#) takes up Epicurus's central ethical claim that "death is nothing to us" and examines both the importance of this argument for his overall ethical theory, but also its intrinsic philosophical power, however counterintuitive at first glance. Unlike Aristotle, who thinks his views take on plausibility the more they align with the best available beliefs, the Epicureans are keen to revise and purify what they take to be the mass of our mistaken ordinary beliefs. None is as harmful to us and to society at large as the belief that death is something terrible and to be feared. Interestingly, at various times, even philosophers greatly influenced by Epicureans in other areas of philosophy took this particular claim to be untenable, either because they were convinced of their own immortality or because they thought that such a claim was impossible for a hedonist to maintain coherently; but it is noteworthy how Epicurus's claims here have again sprung to the center of philosophical attention.

[Chapter 8](#) focuses on the central and difficult question of Epicurus's hedonism, which forms the backbone of his ethical theory. At the same time, trying to fashion the great variety of remaining evidence into a coherent theory is not only a formidable conceptual task, but also a Herculean doxographical one as well, especially since in addition to what remains from Epicurus himself and later Epicureans such as Philodemus,

Diogenes of Oenoanda, and Lucretius, one must contend with the detailed and typically unfriendly criticism of Cicero ([Chapter 18](#)) and Plutarch ([Chapter 20](#)). The theory itself is complex and Epicurus developed it within a rich context of hedonist theorizing that included the Cyrenaics from whose views he was especially concerned to differentiate his own. The Cyrenaics held a radically presentist view of pleasure in which pleasure can be experienced only in the moment. Epicureans were keen to show that our pleasures, especially the kinds of mental pleasure discounted by the Cyrenaics—such as pleasures of memory and anticipation—were more valuable than the bodily pleasures recommended by Cyrenaics. These mental pleasures extend beyond the present, but somehow, for Epicureans, still retain their immunity to being diminished by death. Many have argued that various details of Epicurus’s overall project are untenable, but the influence of a more generalized notion of Epicurean hedonism has been palpable from the Renaissance ([Chapter 24](#)), and then on through to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French ([Chapter 27](#)) and British thought ([Chapter 29](#)).

Many of Epicurus’s central doctrines have provoked intense reactions from the very beginning. His materialism, hedonism, denial of divine providence and the immortality of the soul, his mechanistic views of the origins of our mental faculties and social behavior, his claims about the harmlessness of death—all historically have engendered bitter opposition as well as advocates who have adopted individual facets of his philosophy. The contributors in this volume offer a representative cross-section of both sides of these debates from antiquity to the present. It seems clear that not only are these debates continuing, but often in ways that uncover ever new aspects of their ultimate Epicurean origins. What often makes Epicureanism so compelling to (post-)modern readers is that Epicurus’s problems seem to be closer to our problems in a way that distinguishes him from his ancient rivals—at least for those who no longer believe in a teleological universe governed by divine providence, the immortality of our souls, that we are naturally inclined to pursue virtue and happiness in a *polis* together, etc. Interestingly, although most contemporary philosophers who have engaged with Epicureanism, because of the nature of the discipline these days, have engaged only with some parts of Epicurus’s thought in isolation ([Chapter 7](#)), one important and perhaps even crucial challenge that Epicureanism raises is the demand for more systematic examinations of, say, how our

views of politics are connected to our views of the nature of death, or how our conceptions of free will stand up in the light of our most up-to-date knowledge of physics—and then, even more philosophically taxing—how all four of these elements in our thinking are mutually related. Epicureanism thus offers a systematic challenge to philosophers to rise above their specialisms. By the same token, as professional philosophy continues its drift into increasing isolation and public irrelevance, Epicureanism perhaps offers models here as well, since it has found voices, including those of great poets, writers, and statesmen, to address pressing problems in a public discourse that allows for mutual intelligibility and, hence, criticism.

I am grateful to David Konstan and Tony Long for first suggesting that I edit the volume and I would like to thank the contributors, all of whom have made this a much more pleasant task than I could have reasonably expected. Phoebe Garrett did the lion's share of putting the volume together, correcting it, and seeing it through to the end, all the while writing her own important study of Suetonius. I wish to especially thank the following for their translations: David Konstan ([Chapter 5](#)); Leonardo Karrer and Carlo Da Via ([Chapter 15](#)); Matthias Hanses ([Chapter 20](#)); and David Armstrong ([Chapter 26](#)).

My heartfelt gratitude goes to Stefan Vranka for being a wise and patient editor and I have continually relied on and benefited from his advice. Tim Beck is to be thanked for corrections that were always to the point and that made for a much cleaner final manuscript.

Finally, at least to the extent that one *porcus de grege Epicuri* is allowed to piggyback on the labor of others, I would like to dedicate this volume to two eminent Epicurean scholars, David Konstan and David Sider, both long-time friends and colleagues. The two of them met more than sixty years ago and seem to have taken to heart Epicurus's strictures about laughing while doing philosophy. I thank them both for including the new kid on the block into their waggish company. No doubt Epicurus would have recommended a higher proportion of philosophy to laughter, but nonetheless I would have experienced much less of both without them.

<sup>1</sup> For an overview, see for instance, Ben Bradley, Fred Feldman, and Jens Johansson, *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Death* (Oxford, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> See M. Erler, *Epicurus. An Introduction to his Practical Ethics and Politics* (Schwabe, 2020) for a helpful discussion of the many ways that Epicureanism did not preclude innovation, individual emphasis, and flexibility among its adherents.

# PART I

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## EPICURUS

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## CHAPTER 1

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# EPICURUS AND THE EPICUREAN SCHOOL

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TIZIANO DORANDI

## SOURCES

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THE school founded by Epicurus in Athens in 307/6 or 305/4 survived as an institution until the first century BCE. Between the fourth and first centuries BCE the school maintained its strength and vitality, developing and renewing itself in some aspects of thought. An uninterrupted series of scholars from Epicurus to Patro withstood the odds and ensured continuity. After a period obscure to us, in the second century CE, we again have information about certain Epicurean philosophers and about the continuity of the teaching of Epicureanism in Athens and Asia Minor.<sup>1</sup>

Very little of the literary and philosophical production of the Epicureans has come down to us, although sources indicate that it had been considerable. Even the most basic biographical information is rare and at times questionable.

Several ancient documents help us reconstruct Epicurus's life and work. Some of them are of primary importance. Diogenes Laertius wrote a *Life of*

*Epicurus* (10.1–28), which includes the will of Epicurus (10.16–21), said to have been written on his deathbed (10.22), and a selection of titles of his works. Interspersed within it are also short biographies of Metrodorus, Hermarchus, Polyaenus, and lists of their writings. The final part of the book transmits three doctrinal epistles of Epicurus and a collection of forty *Key Doctrines*. Remains of some books of the masterwork of Epicurus, *On Nature*, are preserved in the library found in the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum.

Certain works of Philodemus of Gadara, whose philosophical treatises are also found among the papyri of Herculaneum, are another serendipitous source for reconstructing not only the biographies of various Epicurean individuals, but also aspects of community life within the school and its organization. Philodemus wrote a biography, *On Epicurus*, in at least two books.<sup>2</sup> In another work by the same author, *Memoirs* (*P.Herc.* 1418/310), we find several letters of Epicurus and other members of the School.<sup>3</sup> The meager fragments of Philodemus's *Collection of Philosophers* dedicated to the Garden preserve the remains of the wills of Polystratus and Dionysius of Lamptre.<sup>4</sup> Fragments of letters of Epicurus and testimony about his life are transmitted in other works of Philodemus (*On Piety*, *On Wealth*).<sup>5</sup> For reconstructing some aspects of the unsettling phenomenon of “dissidence” within the Garden, a book by Philodemus with an uncertain title, preserved in two copies (*P.Herc.* 1005 and *P.Herc.* 1485),<sup>6</sup> is indispensable. *On Frank Criticism* is essential for getting an idea of the internal organization of the School.<sup>7</sup> The anonymous author of the anepigraphic text of *P.Herc.* 176 gives abundant epistolary testimony relating to Epicurus and his students, in particular, members of the Epicurean School of Lampsacus (Polyaenus, Leonteus, Idomeneus and Batis, Metrodorus's sister and Idomeneus's wife).<sup>8</sup> Another papyrus, also anonymous and anepigraphic, but perhaps to be attributed to Philodemus, transmits the rather poor remains of the *Life of Philonides*, an Epicurean of the second century BCE from Laodicea in Syria.<sup>9</sup> Finally, there were other authors who dedicated works to the exegesis of Epicurus and his successors, but they are now lost or reduced to a few citations, and so to list them here would be tedious.<sup>10</sup>

## THE PROTAGONISTS

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## Epicurus

Epicurus (342/1–271/0) was born at Samos to a family of Athenian colonists.<sup>11</sup> We know little about his early years or his training before his arrival in Athens in 307/6.

Diogenes Laertius says that he was a school teacher. According to tradition, Epicurus dedicated himself to philosophy when his teachers were unable to explain Hesiod's Chaos (*Theog.* 116).<sup>12</sup> Among his direct or indirect teachers of philosophy are recorded Democritus and Nausiphanes of Teos. Leaving Samos, Epicurus went to Mytilene on Lesbos, and then to Lampsacus on the coast of present-day Turkey, where he taught philosophy. At Mytilene he had Hermarchus as a student; at Lampsacus, he had, among others, Idomeneus, Metrodorus, Pythocles, and Polyaenus. One letter of the young Epicurus, addressed to his mother, preserved by Diogenes of Oenoanda (Smith fr. 125–26), contains important information about his philosophical formation.<sup>13</sup>

After teaching five years at Mytilene and Lampsacus, Epicurus came to Athens where he founded a school which, from its location, became known as the Garden (*Kēpos*). The Garden, bought for 80 minas, was located outside the walls of Athens, beyond the Dipylon, along the road which led to the Academy. The personal residence of Epicurus, located in the deme Melite, was to be distinct from the Garden. Epicurus was based in Athens for the rest of his life, engaged in common philosophical inquiry (*syzyētēsis*) with his closest students. Among the members of the first inner circle of friends and students who frequented the Garden, besides Hermarchus and Metrodorus, four stand out: Pythocles, Polyaenus, Colotes, and Idomeneus. Epicurus had met all four at Lampsacus and they followed him to Athens or joined him there. At the encouragement of Epicurus, his three brothers, Neocles, Cheredemus, and Aristobulus, also devoted themselves to philosophy. Noteworthy is the presence in the school of some female students: Batis, Boidion, Demetria, Hedeia, Leontion, Mammarrion, Nikidion, and Themista.<sup>14</sup>

The school in Lampsacus remained active even after Epicurus departed for Athens. Epicurus maintained close relations with the disciples whom he

left behind at Lampsacus with a frequent exchange of letters, part of which has come down to us. He made one or more trips himself to Lampsacus in subsequent years.<sup>15</sup> In a fragment of a letter to a girl, Epicurus speaks of a trip in the company of Hermarchus and Ctesippus.<sup>16</sup>

The years 293–291 mark a period of crisis in the community of Lampsacus.<sup>17</sup> Closely linked to the events of the school of Lampsacus is also the schism of Metrodorus's brother, Timocrates, who left Epicurus's school and began a smear campaign against the Master and other members of the Garden.<sup>18</sup>

Epicurus was a prolific author. Diogenes Laertius (10.27–28) credits him with having written three hundred books, and mentions a variety of titles: 1. *On Nature* (in thirty-seven books); 2. *On Atoms and Void*; 3. *On Love*; 4. *Epitome of Objections to the Physicists*; 5. *Against the Megarians*; 6. *Problems*; 7. *Key Doctrines*; 8. *On Choice and Avoidance*; 9. *On the End*; 10. *On the Criterion, or The Canon*; 11. *Chaeredemos*; 12. *On the Gods*; 13. *On Religion*; 14. *Hegesianax*; 15. *On Lives* (in four books); 16. *On Just Action*; 17. *Neocles, addressed to Themista*; 18. *Symposium*; 19. *Eurylochus, addressed to Metrodorus*; 20. *On Vision*; 21. *On the Angle in the Atom*; 22. *On Touch*; 23. *On Fate*; 24. *Opinions on the Internal Sensations, addressed to Timocrates*; 25. *Prognostic*; 26. *The Protreptic*; 27. *On Images*; 28. *On Perception*; 29. *Aristobulus*; 30. *On Music*; 31. *On Justice and the Other Virtues*; 32. *On Gifts and Gratitude*; 33. *Polymedes*; 34. *Timocrates* (in three books); 35. *Metrodorus* (in five books); 36. *Antidorus* (in two books); 37. *Opinions on Diseases, addressed to Mithres*; 38. *Callistolas*; 39. *On Kingship*; 40. *Anaximenes*; 41. *Letters*.

Nearly all these writings are lost; others are only partially preserved, among them a book of the treatise *On Nature*. Others not included in the catalog are transmitted in an unexpected way—by Diogenes Laertius himself. The three letters addressed respectively to Herodotus, Pythocles, and Menoeceus, fall into this last category.

The *Letter to Herodotus* (10.35–83) is offered by Epicurus as an epitome aimed at three categories of readers: (1) those who have already mastered even the more difficult aspects of natural science, (2) those less advanced but nonetheless familiar already with the philosophical and scientific atmosphere of Epicureanism, and (3) those who still remain at the level of an initial or superficial contact with philosophy. The letter is divided into

three well-constructed and organized parts. In the first part (37–45), Epicurus discusses the principles of physics (*physiologia*). In the second (45–76), he deals with the structure and properties of the compounds, formed of atoms moving in a void. In the third (76–82), he discusses the function and purpose of the study of nature.<sup>19</sup>

The *Letter to Pythocles* (10.83–116), of which the authenticity is sometimes called into question,<sup>20</sup> contains an analysis of meteorological phenomena. Epicurus presents the letter as a concise exposition, the aim of which was to aid the reader in the memorization of his thoughts on the subject. He undertakes to persuade Pythocles that the knowledge of celestial phenomena has no other purpose than the attainment of *ataraxia* and blessed life. After a few paragraphs on methodology (85–88), Epicurus discusses cosmology in general (88–91) and then moves on to deal with the stars (92–98), their movements and mutations (especially the moon and sun). The third part (98–111) is restricted to a description of meteorological phenomena (clouds, rain, wind, thunder, lightning, etc.). The fourth part (111–16) is to do with astronomical subjects.

The *Letter to Menoeceus* (10.121–35) is offered by Epicurus as a summary of his ethical thought, with a focus upon modes of life and upon choosing some things and rejecting others. Epicurus undertakes first to fight the troubles that we bring upon ourselves by false assumptions that we have about the gods and death (123–27). With a view to our caring for both body and soul together, he then sets forth his classification of desires (127–28) and offers a theory of pleasure and self-sufficiency (128–32). The letter concludes with a discussion of *phronēsis* (practical wisdom) and reaffirmation of the superiority of the sage (133–34) in a form that summarizes the four components of the so-called *tetrapharmakon*, the fourfold remedy for the attainment of happiness: (1) the sage does not fear the gods and (2) does not care about death; (3) the limit of good things is easy to achieve and easy to provide, and (4) the limit of bad things is either short-lived or causes little trouble.<sup>21</sup>

Diogenes Laertius transcribes also a selection of forty Epicurean maxims (139–54), the *Key Doctrines* (138). The maxims are organized roughly into three sections: ethics (1–21 and 26–30), epistemology (22–25), and justice and social relations (31–40).

We have another collection of eighty maxims of ethical content, entitled *Epicurus's Exhortation*, transmitted in a codex of the Vatican Library (Vat. gr. 1950). That collection is best known by the title *Vatican Sayings* (SV). Thirteen of these maxims correspond to *Key Doctrines* (SV 1 = KD 1; 2 = 2; 3 = 4; 5 = 5; 6 = 25; 8 = 15; 12 = 17; 13 = 27; 20 = 29; 22 = 19; 49 = 12; 50 = 8; 72 = 13).<sup>22</sup>

In the two collections of *Key Doctrines* and *Vatican Sayings*, the maxims are attributed in their entirety only to Epicurus, although some of them should be attributed to other Epicureans of the first generation, among whom is certainly Metrodorus.<sup>23</sup>

A selection of maxims is also preserved by the large inscription which the Epicurean Diogenes of Oenoanda had engraved on the wall of the porch of his home city in Anatolia. Some are totally unknown to the tradition; others correspond to some of the *Key Doctrines* (1–6, 8, 10, 13, 16, 25–26, 29, 32, and 37) or some of the *Vatican Sayings*.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, several maxims are attributed to Epicurus and Epicureans of the first generation by Seneca, Plutarch, Porphyry, and Stobaeus in the *Gnomologia* and other collections of proverbs. Some are known through the testimony of papyri, inscriptions, and a mosaic.<sup>25</sup>

The principal work of Epicurus, *On Nature*, which occupied thirty-seven books, has not come down to us intact. A few books of the work, some in two or more copies, have come to light among the rolls of the library of Herculaneum, typically in a rather poor state of preservation. The following is a list of the books which are preserved, accompanied by a summary of their contents.<sup>26</sup>

Book 2, preserved in two exemplars (*P.Herc.* 1149 + 993; 1783 + 1691 + 1010): Epicurus discusses simulacra, their existence, formation, and the speed of their movement. If we are to believe the scholium to *Ep. Hdt.* 73, the book also contained a discussion of time.<sup>27</sup>

Book 11, preserved in two exemplars (*P.Herc.* 1042; 154): this book deals with cosmology, the shape of the earth, and its position in the universe. It also contains an argument against the use of astronomical instruments, and a discussion on the stability of the earth.<sup>28</sup>

Book 14 (*P.Herc.* 1148): Epicurus criticizes the theory of the elements in Plato's *Timaeus* in the broader context of polemic against the doctrines of so-called pluralists. In the final section of the book, Epicurus defends

himself against charges of plagiarizing his doctrines from his predecessors.<sup>29</sup>

Book 15 (*P.Herc.* 1151): this book, quite fragmentary, was dedicated to a discussion of atoms and compounds. It also contained a critique of Anaxagoras's doctrine of *homoiomereia* ("having the same parts").<sup>30</sup>

Book 25 (*P.Herc.* 419 + 1634 + 697, 454 + 1420 + 1056, 1191): in this book, preserved in three exemplars, Epicurus, starting from the affirmation of human perfectibility and moral responsibility within a physicalist conception of reality, attempts to "demonstrate and explain the existence of a human capacity for self-determination."<sup>31</sup>

Book 28 (*P.Herc.* 1479/1417): this book reports the content of Epicurus's discussions with his student Metrodorus in the company of other members of the Garden. The discussion focuses on two key issues: (1) the use of means of expression in philosophical inquiry as a guarantee of the accuracy of the concepts, and (2) whether—and to what extent and by what means of verification—it is possible for the philosopher to make use of ordinary language without compromising such accuracy and falling into ambiguity.<sup>32</sup>

Book 34 (*P.Herc.* 1431): in this book at least two issues were discussed: fear produced by superstition and the problem of sensory and mental perception.<sup>33</sup>

*Liber incertus* (*P.Herc.* 1416 + 1413): the theme of this book was the doctrine of time.<sup>34</sup>

## **The First Generation: "The Guides" (*hoi kathēgemones*) or "The Men" (*hoi andres*)**

Philodemus indicates with the name "the guides" (*hoi kathēgemones*) or "the men" (*hoi andres*) of the Garden a group of four Epicureans of the first generation who directed the school and established its fundamental philosophical principles in discussion with one another. They were Epicurus, Metrodorus, Hermarchus, and Polyaenus.



Metrodorus was born in 331/0; he met Epicurus in Lampsacus. He died seven or eight years before the Master in 378/7. His brother Timocrates was famous for his fierce polemic against Epicurus and the Garden. His sister Batis married Idomeneus.

Diogenes Laertius (10.24–25) transmits a list of titles of works by Metrodorus, none of which has survived intact: *Against the Physicians* (in three books); *On Sensations*; *Against Timocrates*; *On Magnanimity*; *On Epicurus's Ill Health*; *Against the Dialecticians*; *Against the Sophists* (in nine books); *The Way to Wisdom*; *On Change*; *On Wealth*; *Against Democritus*; and *On Noble Birth*. Other sources give the following titles as well: *Against Plato's "Gorgias"* (in two books), *Against Plato's "Euthyphro"*, and *Against Those Who Claim That Good Orators Are the Product of Natural Philosophy*.<sup>35</sup>

We can reconstruct some aspects of the thought of Metrodorus and therefore the content of his writings. Metrodorus discussed with Epicurus problems related to language; at the end of *On Nature* Book 28, Epicurus refers to the discussions.<sup>36</sup> In *Against Those Who Claim That Good Orators Are the Product of Natural Philosophy*, Metrodorus discusses the definition and role of rhetoric, sustaining arguments contrary to those of Nausiphanes.<sup>37</sup> According to Metrodorus true rhetoric is distinct from natural science. Only sophistic (or epideictic) rhetoric can be considered an art (*technē*), a status which cannot be assigned to forensic or political rhetoric.

In the work *On Wealth*, Metrodorus shows how the sage is to obtain wealth and administer his household. In accordance with Epicurus, he defends the idea of natural wealth. In the treatises *Against the Dialecticians*, *Against the Sophists*, *Against Democritus*, *Against Plato's "Gorgias"*, and *Against Plato's "Euthyphro"*, Metrodorus attacked the doctrines of adversaries of Epicureanism. The library of Herculaneum preserves the fragmentary remains of one book of Metrodorus, either *Against the Dialecticians*<sup>38</sup> or *Against the Sophists*.<sup>39</sup>

Körte also attributed to Metrodorus the text preserved in *P.Herc.* 831, now more plausibly assigned to Demetrius Laco.<sup>40</sup>

An untimely death prevented Metrodorus from succeeding Epicurus as director of the Garden. Thus the first successor of Epicurus (in 270) was his former student and contemporary from Mytilene, Hermarchus (died c.

250).<sup>41</sup> Hermarchus may have studied rhetoric in his youth. He met Epicurus in Mytilene around 310 BCE. His conversion to philosophy was not immediate. He was reunited with his teacher in Athens only after the founding of the Garden. Between 290 and 270, he went to Lampsacus to visit the local Epicurean school. At his death, Epicurus entrusted the direction of the Garden to Hermarchus, although he was not an Athenian citizen but rather a metic. The first stage in the history of Epicureanism, which was characterized by a group of students who had heard the Master directly, comes to a close with the death of Hermarchus.

Diogenes Laertius (fr. 25) provides a few titles of Hermarchus's works: *Essays in the Form of Letters* (*Epistolika*); *Against Empedocles* (in twenty-two books); *On Sciences*; *Against Plato*; *Against Aristotle*. In addition, we know at least two sayings attributed to him (fr. 23–24), letters (fr. 40–42), and some testimony of Philodemus or later writers on ethical subjects (fr. 43–48). *Essays in the Form of Letters* and *Against Empedocles* are two distinct works.<sup>42</sup> An *epistolikon*, addressed to an unknown Theopheides, dated precisely to 267/6, is preserved in Philodemus's *Rhetoric* (fr. 35–36; cf. 37–39).<sup>43</sup> It contains an argument of Hermarchus against the Megarian philosopher Alexinus of Elis. Hermarchus, like Epicurus and Metrodorus, argues that sophistic rhetoric alone has the status of an art (*technē*). The chronology of *Against Empedocles* (fr. 27–34) is uncertain, and it is also uncertain whether the work was directed against Empedocles's *Purifications*. The larger fragment (fr. 34) is preserved in Porphyry's *On Abstinence*. It discusses the origin of law in primitive society. In the other fragments, Hermarchus addresses theological issues (fr. 27, 29–32). The hypothesis that Epicurus *KD* 31–40 was derived from this work is unfounded.<sup>44</sup> The fragment of *Against Plato* (fr. 48) comes from a passage of Proclus in which Hermarchus discusses the opportuneness of prayer. No fragments of the other titles are preserved. Ancient sources, however, preserve testimony of Hermarchus's thought on anger (fr. 43), flattery (fr. 44), friendship (fr. 45), and the necessity of a frugal life (fr. 47). Correspondence of Hermarchus is also attested (fr. 40–42).

Polyaenus was born at Lampsacus, the precise year being unknown. He met Epicurus during his stay in Lampsacus (311/0–307/6) and was converted to philosophy. He had already distinguished himself as a mathematician. He died in 278/7. The remains of an anonymous biography

of Polyaeus are preserved in *P.Herc.* 176. We have information about some of his works: *On Definitions*, *On Philosophy*, *Against Ariston*, *Difficulties*, *On the Moon*, and *Against the Orators*. The *Difficulties* were defended by Demetrius Laco in his (unfortunately very fragmentary) treatise *Additions to Polyaeus's "Difficulties."*<sup>45</sup>

Among the immediate disciples of Epicurus of whom we have some concrete information, we may also make mention of Colotes and Carneiscus.

Colotes was a native of Lampsacus, where he followed Epicurus's teaching during his stay in that city.<sup>46</sup> His most important work was entitled *On the Point That Conformity to the Doctrines of the Other Philosophers Actually Makes it Impossible to Live*. The work did not survive as a whole, but may be partly reconstructed thanks to the allegations directed against it by Plutarch in his *Reply to Colotes in Defence of the Other Philosophers* (1107d–1127e). Colotes composed his treatise to combat the sceptical Academy of Arcesilaus by reviewing, in addition to the opinions of the Cyrenaics and Arcesilaus, those of Democritus, Parmenides, Empedocles, Socrates, Melissus, Plato, and Stilpo. Particularly interesting are the criticisms directed against Plato and Democritus. Arcesilaus is criticized for his doctrine of *epochē* against which Colotes put forth that of *enargeia*. From other sources we also know that Colotes wrote a work against Plato's myths in *Republic* Book 10. Colotes reproaches Plato for dispensing with *paideia* in his myths, i.e. using non-scientific and irrational means. The fragments of his books *Against Plato's "Lysis"* and *Against Plato's "Euthydemus"* are preserved in *P.Herc.* 208 and *P.Herc.* 1032. In these two works, Colotes rejects the concepts of *doxazomenon* or *doxa* ("opinion") on the basis of that which is clear (*enarges*). He also discusses the interpretation of poets and rejects poetry as devoid of any utility. Philodemus may also have known of a work entitled *On Law and Popular Reputation*.<sup>47</sup>

Carneiscus was a direct disciple of Epicurus. The final part of Book 2 of his work on friendship, *Philista*, is preserved in a fragmentary state in *P.Herc.* 1027. This book, dedicated to a certain Zopyrus, was directed against the Peripatetic Praxiphanes, author of a treatise on friendship which proposed a model for behavior inadequate for relations between friends.<sup>48</sup>

## Polystratus to Apollodorus

At the death of Hermarchus, the year of which is unknown to us, Polystratus became scholarch of the Garden, who himself died sometime before 220/19. We know little about him. It appears that he had never been a personal student of Epicurus himself. The date of his birth is placed in the first decades of the third century BCE. The Herculaneum papyri preserve the remains of two works of his. The first is entitled *On Irrational Contempt for Popular Opinions* (*P.Herc.* 336/1150), in which Polystratus argues against philosophers (probably the Sceptics and Cynics in particular) who denied any importance whatever to public opinion. The second was a protreptic treatise called *On Philosophy*, the scant remains of which are preserved in *P.Herc.* 1520.<sup>49</sup>

Dionysius of Lamptre (died 201/0) and Basilides of Tyrus (died c. 175) were the third and fourth scholarchs of the Garden. The little information we have about Dionysius is found in Diogenes Laertius (10.25) and (probably) from the fragments of *P.Herc.* 1780, by Philodemus.

Basilides was the teacher of Philonides of Laodicea in Syria. He studied mathematics and was in contact with the father of the astronomer Hypsicles, with whom he discoursed in Alexandria on a treatise by Apollonius of Perga. With Thespis, another Epicurean, he played a role in an argument concerning the subject of anger, both of them taking a position against Nicasirates and Timasagoras. It has been supposed that Basilides belonged to an Epicurean community in Syria.<sup>50</sup>

There is a gap of enough time between Basilides and Apollodorus, known as the Tyrant of the Garden, to lead one to suggest the existence of at least another intermediate scholarch. There may be indication of this in Thespis.<sup>51</sup> The chronology and development of events of these years, however, remain obscure.

The mother school of Athens continued on with Apollodorus, born in the early second century and scholarch from the middle of the century up to c. 110 and remembered as a prolific writer by Diogenes Laertius (10.25), who attributes more than four hundred books to him. We have testimony of the following works: the *Life of Epicurus*, *On Philosophical Sects*, and *On Legislators*. The authorship of all but the first is disputed. No fragments are preserved of Apollodorus's writings, and we know nothing of his thought.

Philonides of Laodicea and Protarchus of Bargylia also belong in this same period, two prominent Epicureans who lived in remote areas. Their activity is indicative of a spread of Epicureanism in countries far from Athens, especially in regions of Asia Minor.

Philonides was a member of a politically engaged family. He studied philosophy at Athens with Basilides and Thespis, geometry with Eudemus, Dionysiodorus, and Artemon. A prolific writer, he composed, among other things, a commentary on Book 8 of Epicurus's *On Nature* and a work entitled *On Artemon's Commentary* (on Books 1–33 of Epicurus's *On Nature*). He produced epitomes of the letters of Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Hermarchus, deemed “useful for lazy young people,” and also organized letters by genre.<sup>52</sup>

Protarchus was the teacher of Demetrius Laco, perhaps at Miletus.<sup>53</sup>

For the islands of Cos and Rhodes, we have news of the existence of Epicurean circles autonomous from the parent school in Athens. Their representatives (if we are to believe Philodemus) argued philosophical positions that differed from those of the Masters (*andres, kathēgemones*) of the Garden. Among the philosophers who probably belonged to the school in Rhodes, we know of Nicasicrates and Timasagoras.

## Demetrius Laco, Zeno of Sidon, and Phaedrus

The important figure of Demetrius Laco also belongs primarily in the second century (c. 150–75), a celebrated Epicurean who never attained the scholarchate, perhaps because he taught at Miletus.

Below is an attempt at presenting his work thematically.<sup>54</sup>

Cosmology. The text transmitted by *P.Herc.* 1013 concerns the size of the sun, which, according to Epicurus, is the same size as it appears to our eyes. Demetrius defends the Epicurean position against Stoic rivals, Dionysius of Cyrene, and perhaps Posidonius.

Theology. (1) The existence of a lost commentary (*hypomnema*) on the gods can be deduced from col. 24 of *P.Herc.* 1055. The same papyrus transmitted the remains of a polemic directed against the Stoics and Peripatetics about divine anthropomorphism.

Ethics. (1) *P.Herc.* 1006: in the meager fragments of this text can be made out references to *hēdonē* and the fear of the gods. (2) *P.Herc.* 831: a treatise on ethics perhaps entitled *On Vain Imagining*, should be attributed to Demetrius. It was once erroneously attributed to Metrodorus. Demetrius directs his argument towards young people and presents philosophy and physics (*physiologia*) as the only effective means of combating emotional turmoil. (3) *Handbook*: the title is quoted by Demetrius himself (*P.Herc.* 1013, col. 17.6–10). The book probably discussed issues of ethics in addition to physics.

Writings of “philology.” The “philological” activities of Demetrius can be illustrated by *P.Herc.* 1012. In this work, Demetrius discusses some problematic passages of the works of Epicurus and gives an interpretation of them based on a philological examination of the text, first critically examining the value of the transmitted readings and the more plausible corrections.

Works on literature. The treatise *On Poems* took up at least two books. From the first (*P.Herc.* 188) there survive a few fragments that deal especially with the presuppositions necessary for forming a critical judgment on poetic texts. In the second (*P.Herc.* 1014) Demetrius sets himself the task of defining the methods of Epicurean inquiry so that he can apply them also in literary criticism against his Peripatetic opponents.

Mathematical works. The treatise *On Geometry* (*P.Herc.* 1061) was intended to refute certain theorems of the first book of Euclid’s *Elements*, using as a starting point the Epicurean doctrine of atomic minima (*elachista*). Topically similar was the book entitled *Additions to Polyaenus’s “Difficulties”* (*P.Herc.* 1083, 1258, 1429, 1642, 1647, 1822). Demetrius wrote this work to integrate Polyaenus’s *Difficulties*, a treatise which had been written against certain aspects of Euclidean geometry and which had been criticized by the Stoic Dionysius of Cyrene.

Finally, the *subscriptio* of *P.Herc.* 1786 contains Demetrius’s name, but the work is illegible.

In Athens, at the demise of Apollodorus, known as the Tyrant of the Garden, the direction of the school went to Zeno of Sidon (c. 150–75).

Of this philosopher, who was to play an important role in the history of Epicureanism between the second and first centuries BCE, there survives only scattered testimony and a list of titles of his works (fr. 12).<sup>55</sup> He



showed an interest in rhetoric (frr. 17–20), poetics (fr. 21), logic (frr. 15–16), and geometry (fr. 27), but nevertheless did not eschew the study of ethics (fr. 23), theology (frr. 22, 24), and physics. We can reconstruct some aspects of his views on logic through the testimony of Philodemus's *On Methods of Inference* (*P.Herc.* 1065). We have an idea of his mathematical thought thanks to the Neoplatonist Proclus's commentary on the first book of Euclid's *Elements*. Proclus tells of a bitter controversy between Zeno the Epicurean and the Stoic Posidonius over geometric principles (*archai*) and their validity.<sup>56</sup>

Sources also speak of a certain Aristion, an Epicurean who organized the anti-Roman resistance in Athens during the siege of Sulla in 87 BCE.

Zeno and Demetrius's interest in disciplines such as poetry, rhetoric, and mathematics can be seen as an attempt on the part of these philosophers to bring Epicureanism up to the level of other Hellenistic philosophies by re-evaluating the role of disciplines neglected by Epicureans of the first generations on the grounds that they do not contribute to the achievement of the highest good. In these pursuits, Demetrius and Zeno maintained the validity of an empirically based epistemology, even for these *technai*.

The dedications of some of the writings of Demetrius Laco to Roman personages (Irenaeus and Quintus) may also correspond to a particular need on the part of Demetrius to keep the dedicatees up to date on the latest in Epicurean thought. The same approach is even more pronounced in Philodemus, whose patron was L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, and also for Lucretius, whose patron was C. Memmius.<sup>57</sup>

In the years which range from the Mithridatic domination of Athens (88–March 1, 86) until the death of Zeno of Sidon (c. 75) and the succession to the scholarchate of Phaedruss, the Garden underwent a very difficult period. It is evident from a series of indications that within the Garden we are witnessing a crisis similar to that which simultaneously involved the other philosophical schools of Athens. The most well-known episode of this crisis is, without doubt, Philodemus's decision to leave Athens and go to Italy.<sup>58</sup>

The Epicurean school in Athens continued to exist after Zeno of Sidon, despite the crisis and political events, at least until the middle of the first century with Phaedruss (c. 138–70 BCE) and Patro (still scholarch in 51).

Phaedrus belonged to a distinguished Athenian family. He was born around 138 BCE. He was at Athens in 94, but not in 88 during the tyranny of Athenion. In this period, he lived in Rome where he met Cicero, Atticus, and Lucius and Appius Saufei. He returned to Athens after the reconquest of Sulla. In his later years he obtained the scholarchate of the Garden after Zeno. He died in 70. Despite the fact that Phaedrus and Zeno were nearly contemporary and active in Athens, there is no doubt that both held the scholarchate of the Garden.<sup>59</sup>

Patro succeeded Phaedrus as director of the Garden in 70 BCE. Before that date, he had stayed in Rome, where he associated with Cicero and Atticus, among others. Thanks to the intervention of Cicero, he was able to prevent Memmius from constructing a new building as a replacement for Epicurus's house in the deme of Melite.<sup>60</sup>

## **Philodemus, Lucretius, and the Spread of Epicureanism in Italy**

While in Athens the Garden (as the other philosophical schools) headed towards a slow but inexorable decline, in Italy, after the first unsuccessful attempt by Alcius and Filiscus in 155 BCE, and the crude propagandistic activity of popularizers such as C. Amafinius, Catius, and Rabirius, we witness a new historical phase of Epicureanism in the first century BCE, namely a large number of followers. The credit for this revival is attributed to the work, in Greek, of Epicurean circles in Campania represented by Philodemus, and perhaps also Siro, and the contribution, in Latin, of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*. The lively anti-Epicurean campaign conducted by Cicero during the same period is indicative of the growing importance of the teachings of the Garden in the Roman world at the end of the first century BCE.<sup>61</sup>

Philodemus of Gadara (c. 110–40) left Athens (probably after Zeno's death, c. 75) and went to Italy, where he was active first at Rome and then perhaps at Herculaneum in the Villa of his patron, L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus. Philodemus founded a school which he intended to be an ideal continuation of the Garden of Athens, of which the memory was in danger



of vanishing. Once in Italy, Philodemus began his work of spreading, on a scientific basis, the Epicurean doctrine. He had brought with him a wealth of books, perhaps the books of Zeno he had inherited from the Master himself.

Before the discovery of the library at Herculaneum, Philodemus was known as a poet, author of epigrams preserved in the *Greek Anthology*.<sup>62</sup> The papyri have given us numerous prose philosophical works. Their content is quite varied, from philosophical biography to an appreciation of the principles of the *enkyklia mathēmata* (rhetoric, poetry, and music); works of a polemical character and treatises devoted to ethical issues (the virtues and their opposed vices, the choice of lifestyles, the passions); writings on theology and logic; finally, books which reflect upon fundamental aspects of Epicurean doctrine, such as the fear of death and the means at our disposal to overcome it.<sup>63</sup>

The book *On the Good King According to Homer* (*P.Herc.* 1507), dedicated to Piso, appears to be a *speculum principis* (mirror for princes) with protreptic purposes.

With the work entitled *Collection of Philosophers*, which occupied at least ten books, Philodemus proposed to write a “history” of philosophy which was objective and non-polemical, organized by school. The remains of several books are preserved: a “history” of the Academy (*P.Herc.* 1021 and 164), of the Stoa (*P.Herc.* 1018), and of the Garden (*P. Herc.* 1780). Philodemus also sketched the “history” of the Eleatic and Abderite schools (*P.Herc.* 327), that of Pythagoras (*P.Herc.* 1508), and of Socrates (*P.Herc.* 495 and 558). Philodemus also dedicated a particular work to the biography of Epicurus (*P.Herc.* 1289 and 1232) and dealt with biographical aspects of Epicureans of the first generations in the book entitled *Epicurean Memoirs* (*P.Herc.* 1418 and 310).

The great trilogy on rhetoric, poetry, and music, addresses in a systematic and innovative manner some issues that were overlooked or rejected by Epicurus and the earliest Epicureans.

*On Rhetoric*, composed of at least eight books, intends to answer the question whether rhetoric can be considered an art (*technē*). According to Philodemus, sophistic and epideictic rhetoric is an art, but not political rhetoric. Rhetoric, however, does not confer moral qualities, as philosophy does. Only by following philosophy can one be happy. In the first two

books (1: *P.Herc.* 1427; 2: *P.Herc.* 1672 and 1674) Philodemus discusses the status of rhetoric as an art, and in the third (*P.Herc.* 1426 and 1506) he tries to prove that political rhetoric is not able to form statesmen. In the fourth (*P.Herc.* 1423 and 1007/1673) he criticizes sophistic orators and their ideas. In the sixth (*P.Herc.* 1669), the debate on the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric is resumed. The seventh book (*P. Herc.* 1004) is directed against the Stoic Diogenes of Seleucia and an unknown Aristo. The eighth book (*P.Herc.* 1015/832) contains a polemic against Nausiphanes of Teos and Aristotle.

In the five books of *On Poems*, Philodemus analyzes, from the point of view of a philosopher and not a literary critic, the qualities requisite for good poetry. We can consider a poem good, not when it pleases the ear with its rhythm and melody, nor in consideration of the proper arrangement of words, but only if it exhibits a perfect combination of thought and content. The purpose of poetry is not to instruct and cause pleasure for the hearing and mind. The first three books of the work preserve the traces of a controversy on the vexed question of the relationship between form and content. They are directed against Crates of Mallos and some unknown “critics” (*kritikoi*). In the fourth book (*P.Herc.* 207), Philodemus attacks Aristotle, while in the fifth (*P.Herc.* 1425 and 1538) he criticizes the Peripatetics and the Stoics, and proposes a definition of a good poet and determines the value of good poetry.

The books on music are intended to show that this discipline has no moral effect and does not lead to virtue. We should attribute to music only the pleasure that it brings to the listener, a pleasure that gives rise to a disposition in the soul for the beautiful and the good, but that does not have any moral end in itself.

A large part of the literary production of Philodemus is characterized by a deeply polemical content and emphasis. In *On the Stoics* (*P.Herc.* 339 and 155), the *Politeiai* of Zeno of Citium and Diogenes of Sinope, which resemble each other in their indecencies, are attacked with irony. Philodemus (in the book of which the title is uncertain: *P.Herc.* 1005, 1485) vehemently attacks a group of Epicurean “dissidents” (*sophistai*) who proposed an interpretation of the teaching of Epicurus opposed to that considered “orthodox” by the Masters of the Garden.

The work *On Vices and Their Corresponding Virtues* was composed of at least ten books. Each book was dedicated to the analysis of a vice or the

virtue opposed to it. The ninth book (*P.Herc.* 1424) discussed household administration (*oikonomia*) and some of the ways a philosopher could make a living. Philodemus returns to related matters in the work *On Wealth* (*P.Herc.* 163). Arrogance is the subject of the tenth book (*P.Herc.* 1008). Philodemus paid lively attention to the vice of flattery in several places (for example, in *P.Herc.* 1457 and in *P.Herc.* 1675).

The treatise *On Frank Criticism* (*P.Herc.* 1471) was part of a larger work entitled *On Characters and Lives*. Philodemus considered frankness of speech an art which, like medicine, brought help and relief to people. Probably belonging to the same work were the treatises *On Gratitude* (*P.Herc.* 1414) and *On Conversation* (*P.Herc.* 873).

Philodemus may have written a work on the passions, in which the book that analyzes anger (*P.Herc.* 182) found its place. In this work Philodemus makes a subtle distinction between natural anger (*physikē orgē*) and rage (*thumos*). The sage can be prone to outbursts of anger, but never rage.

Our philosopher also took an interest in theological problems. The first book of *On the Gods* (*P.Herc.* 26) highlighted the harmful effects that a false conception of the divine and death can have on people, preventing them from living happily. Another book (*P.Herc.* 152/157) contains a discussion of the life of the blessed gods, who have no interest in the affairs of mortals. In his work, entitled *On Piety*, Philodemus sets forth the ideas of Epicurus on the gods and their worship, in two books. The gods exist and must be honored in accordance with the laws of the state without the expectation of benefits or punishments from them. The gods live happily, free from all anxiety and without concern for human affairs. In the second book, we read an attack on the ways poets and intellectuals had represented the gods, a polemic against popular religious beliefs, and finally a critique of the theology of the philosophers, in particular the Stoics. The work *On Providence* (*P.Herc.* 1670) was directed against Chrysippus.

Philodemus, like his teacher Zeno, did not disdain the study of logic. In the work *On Methods of Inference* (*P.Herc.* 1065), he presents the method of inference through analogy based upon signs.

Finally, in two texts which are customarily dated to the final years of the philosopher, *On Choices and Avoidance* (*P.Herc.* 1251) and the fourth book of *On Death* (*P.Herc.* 1050), Philodemus focuses on two issues of great moral force: the way the sage conducts his life and his attitude in the face of death, which is nothing to us.

It remains to ask at this point what role Philodemus played in the history of Epicureanism. There are aspects of Philodemus's life and influence that are still mysterious. Philodemus has been presented as a not particularly original thinker, a teacher of Epicureanism who proclaimed the message of his school at the intersection of the Greek and Roman worlds. Faithfully admiring Zeno while he lived, and tirelessly praising him after his death,<sup>64</sup> Philodemus would perpetuate his memory and teaching, and would disseminate his thought with a rich harvest of works that, sometimes at least, appear to be mere updates of notes taken in lessons during his years in Athens.<sup>65</sup> In support of this interpretation, the title of Philodemus's *On Frank Criticism* receives mention. The work is presented as *An Epitome of Characters and Lives from Zeno's Lectures*,<sup>66</sup> and the treatise *On Methods of Inference*, where one can identify a collection of notes that Philodemus had taken from Zeno's lectures on logic, and from writings of Demetrius Laco and the "dissident" Bromius. Sedley compares the work of Philodemus to that of Arrian, popularizer of the teaching of Epictetus, though one is also reminded of the titles of some Neoplatonic Aristotelian *Commentaries*, works of a grammatical or medical character which are presented under the label *apo phōnēs*, that designates precisely the written expression of lecture courses of Ammonius, Olympiodorus, Georgius Choeroboscus, Stephanus of Alexandria—to name just a few—drawn up and edited by students who were present at their lessons and took notes or had shorthand notes taken.<sup>67</sup>

Philodemus has also been described as a new Panaetius of the Garden, who introduced into Epicurean philosophy nuances that, without damage to its fundamental principles, modified and adapted it to the changed needs of his times and to the Roman world.<sup>68</sup> He supposedly achieved this end by a reassessment of *enkyklia mathēmata* and a new and personal version of *enkyklios paideia*. In *On Rhetoric* he gave "sophistic" or "epideictic" rhetoric a place among the *technai*; in *On the Good King According to Homer* he offered a moralizing interpretation of the Homeric epics; he nuanced the position of Epicurus about dealing with anger (*On Anger*), and he found space for the concept of good reputation (*doxa*) among ethical values (*On Flattery*).

The two positions do not seem to me at odds, but are rather complementary. As a matter of fact, the thesis of adaptation is not

incompatible with that which claims a lack of speculative depth and originality on Philodemus's part and sees him as a simple repeater in the history of the school. If anything, if there was really innovation and adaptation (which seems to me undeniable, at least in some respects), it remains to be determined to whom this should be traced back, whether to Philodemus himself or even to his teacher Zeno of Sidon and, possibly, Demetrius Laco, whose complete works, we must not forget, Philodemus possessed.

So I would see Philodemus as a spokesman and diffuser of the thought of his master Zeno. On the death of his teacher, and perhaps also because of the lack of succession in the scholarchate,<sup>69</sup> he had to consider himself invested with the mission of spreading the Epicurean doctrine in Italy in a systematic and definitive way. The deep devotion he felt towards his teacher probably made it appear to Philodemus an urgent duty to make known to a wider audience, and beyond Athens, the philosophical ideas of Zeno, whom he considered *an* authentic interpreter of the *kathēgemones* of the Garden. Being a faithful disciple and the sole repository of the doctrine of his teacher, Philodemus could not avoid this commitment and could not dilute the content of Zeno's thought (except possibly on individual details) without running the risk of misinterpreting or, at the same time, betraying the very teaching of the Founders. Thus Philodemus's own philosophical originality had to take second place to Zeno, the content of whose work he presented again and disseminated, sometimes under his own name. The greater part of the works of Philodemus were probably nothing more than handouts of private lessons with a limited distribution, probably restricted to members of the Epicurean circle of Herculaneum or other learned individuals who frequented the library. This explains why we do not find the tangible and persistent traces of the writings of Philodemus in later authors (the possibility of finding his influence in Sextus Empiricus or Diogenes Laertius is more a matter of conjecture than proof). Philodemus was known to the cultured public of his day primarily as a poet, an author of elegant love epigrams.

Philodemus had taken up residence in the villa of L. Calpurnius Piso in Herculaneum. At the other end of the Gulf of Naples, on the hill of Posillipo overlooking Herculaneum, there was the small country villa (*villula*) of another Epicurean, Siro.<sup>70</sup> We know very little about him. He was an instructor of Vergil in Epicureanism, and with Quintus Varus,

Quintilius Varus, Plotius Tucca, and Vergil, he frequented Philodemus's library. Cicero (*Fin.* 2.119) displays admiration for Philodemus and Siro.

Lucretius, the author of a poem in six books, *De rerum natura*, also contributed significantly to the spread of Epicureanism in Italy.<sup>71</sup>

As a philosopher, Lucretius drew on canonical texts of Epicurus without taking further developments of the doctrine into account.<sup>72</sup> In particular, in the composition of his poem, Lucretius seems to have reworked in a precise and well-organized scheme what is found in a thorough analysis of the *Letter to Herodotus* and the *Letter to Pythocles*, and the content and structure of the first fifteen books of Epicurus's *On Nature*. In *De rerum natura* there is no trace of the later controversy that witnessed Stoics opposing Epicureans and vice versa. Despite having lived in Italy at the time of Philodemus, he does not appear to have taken account of his work. This has led to talk of Lucretius's Epicureanism as "fundamentalist," almost fossilized.<sup>73</sup>

## **From Italy to Athens Again, in Alexandria, and in Asia Minor**

Through the Imperial Age up to late antiquity, whether in the east or the west, Epicureanism continued to spread and show the effects of its vitality.

The letter that Trajan's widow, Pompeia Plotina (*IG*<sup>2</sup> 1099), addressed in 121 CE to Hadrian, which requested and obtained from the emperor that the head of the Epicurean school in Athens could choose as his successor a man who was not a Roman citizen and could express his last wishes about his succession in Greek, proves the existence in Athens in the second century CE of an apparently institutionalized Epicurean school and the survival of the philosophy.<sup>74</sup> It is difficult to maintain, however, that this school is directly descended from the institution founded by Epicurus, which had lapsed in the middle of the first century BCE.<sup>75</sup>

The persistence of Epicureanism is also demonstrated in Alexandria as evidenced by the fragments of the book *Peri Physeos* of the Christian

bishop of that city Dionysius the Great (third century CE), which presuppose a direct reading of the works of Epicurus.<sup>76</sup>

An example of the spread of Epicureanism securely placed within the Imperial period is the work of Diogenianus, an Epicurean whose precise dates are uncertain (perhaps second century CE). Eusebius (*P.E.* 4.3 e 6.8), who preserves extended passages from a work of his against Chrysippus's doctrine of fate, wrongly defines him as a Peripatetic.<sup>77</sup> Diogenianus accepts the truthfulness and admissibility of divination and insists upon the existence of fortune (*tyche*) and fate, which does not exclude our freedom of will.<sup>78</sup>

Lucian's *Alexander the False Prophet* (25) mentions a certain Tiberius Claudius Lepidus, head of the Epicureans of Amastri, and constitutes an interesting document of the presence of groups of Epicureans reunited in a school or community in Asia Minor and in Syria in the second century CE.<sup>79</sup>

An inscription, perhaps of Hadrian's era, found at Apamea is dedicated to Aurelius Belius Phillippus, *hiereus kai diadochos* of the Epicureans of Apamea,<sup>80</sup> a formula which probably means "priest and head of the Epicurean school of Apamea."

Much more important is the testimony of the philosophical inscription of Diogenes of Oenoanda in Lycia. The inscription guarantees the presence of the Epicurean doctrine in areas far from the most populous centers of cultural diffusion.<sup>81</sup>

The fragments belong to a unique inscription that preserves several texts about Epicureanism. Smith has suggested the existence of at least seven writings, or groups of writings, arranged in seven layers. At least three of these texts were written by Diogenes himself: a treatise on physics (frr. 1–27), a treatise on ethics (frr. 28–61), and one about old age (frr. 137–79). In addition to these, numerous letters merit mention, some written by Epicurus (frr. 125–28). The other letters (frr. 62–75, 120–22) are mostly in the hand of Diogenes, such as the *Letter to Antipater* (frr. 62–67), the *Letter to Menneas* (fr. 122), and *Directions to Family and Friends* (frr. 117–18). For several other fragments, the authorship of the text (frr. 129–36) or its placement (frr. 180–81) remain uncertain. A selection of maxims of Epicurus, inscribed under the treatise on ethics, along with other maxims of which Diogenes may be the author (frr. 97–116), completed the text of the inscription.



All these texts and others, now lost, formed an immense inscription, which, like an opened roll of papyrus, offered itself to readers column after column on the walls of a porch of the city of Oenoanda. In this device one can see the effort Diogenes exerted to make the philanthropic message of Epicurus's philosophy accessible not only to citizens of Oenoanda, but also to any foreigners passing by.

## GENUINE (*GNĒSIOI*) EPICUREANS AND DISSIDENT (*SOPHISTAI*) EPICUREANS

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The life of the school during its long existence was not always peaceful. Inside the school there were severe incidents of division early on. While Epicurus was still living, Timocrates, the brother of Metrodorus, left the Garden and also began a smear campaign against Epicurus. Philodemus informs us also of a whole series of Epicureans, “dissidents” (*sophistai*), who lived between the second and the first century BCE and were apparently active in Cos and Rhodes. In their works we read the names of some of these Epicureans and find suggestions of their doctrines. A distinction between the two categories of Epicureans appears in a passage in the *Life of Epicurus* of Diogenes Laertius (10.26), which speaks of a group of members of the Garden that “the genuine Epicureans call sophists (*sophistai*).”<sup>82</sup>

To explain these events, we must refer to that element of cohesion and identity particular to the philosophies of the Hellenistic period, which has been appropriately identified as a “religious” commitment to the *auctoritas* of the founding figure of the school.<sup>83</sup> At the origin of concepts such as *auctor* and *auctoritas* in the philosophical institutions in this period, the texts of the founders occupied a particular position as the bearers of continuity of the Master's thought and the guarantors of its genuineness. Early on they were gathered together to be a “canon.” All further discussions, which provided the schools their intrinsic reason for being and survival, found their origin in these “canonized” collections.

This dynamic is evident in the Garden of Epicurus, where the founder and his early followers had already provided a detailed and systematic exposition of their thought. Under these conditions, little freedom was left



to successors to move very far from the doctrinal tenets—the works of the *kathēgēmones* Epicurus, Metrodorus, Polyaenus, and Hermarchus. These works were therefore soon considered as representing the “canonical” status for the doctrine of the Garden. Some of their writings, however, once they were inherited by later generations, gave rise to exegetical discussions aimed at clarifying obscure points and refining details. This sometimes took the form of a series of different interpretations that were the source of internal controversies for the School.

The Epicureans of younger generations turned their attention in particular to three crucial issues: (1) defining the authenticity of certain books of the *kathēgēmones*, (2) discussing the textual criticism of specific passages deemed corrupt or contradictory in Epicurus, and (3) debating the difficulties which the early works of Epicurus presented, as they were sometimes not free of errors.<sup>84</sup>

A concrete example of this practice is the book of Demetrius Laco preserved in *P.Herc.* 1012. In writing this work, Demetrius proposed an operation of *philologia medicans* parallel to the *philosophia medicans* pursued by Epicurus himself: Demetrius’s objective was to identify the correct reading of the Master’s writings in order that his philosophical message might be transposed into its purest form and could thus have its full effect on those practicing it. To this end, Demetrius employed the methods and tools of Alexandrian philology.<sup>85</sup>

Before reintroducing, albeit only in general terms, the problem of “dissidence,” that is, the contrast between genuine Epicureans (*gnēsioi*) and Epicurean “dissidents” (*sophistai*) and the debate related to the need for a defense of “orthodoxy” of “canonical” thought against certain interpretations considered “heterodox,” a premise is necessary.<sup>86</sup> I maintain that we should rule out the idea that a monolithic form of rigid uniformity and cultural and philosophical immobility dominated in the Garden from Epicurus to Diogenes of Oenoanda, in which the School was identified with only Epicurus, whose pupils and whose other successors were nothing more than mere *epigoni* and empty repeaters. This is not to say that over the course of centuries of Epicureanism there were dramatic innovations or reversals in the basic principles of “canonical” thought. Inside the school—especially from the second century BCE—one can speak of the work of adapting or updating certain aspects of the doctrine under the pressure, for

example, of attacks from the Stoics, and also as a result of changed historical, social, and geographical circumstances.

The traditional interpretation of the static and rigid unity of Epicurean thought is based on the reading of the testimony of Seneca and Numenius.

Seneca writes (*Epist.* 33.4):

We (sc. Stoics) are not subjects of a despot; each is master of himself. With them (sc. Epicureans), on the other hand, what Hermarchus or Metrodorus has said is referred to one alone (sc. Epicurus); all that was said by all the members of this community (*contubernium*) is attributed to the thought of one.

From this passage we can conclude that the Epicureans of the first generations lived in community (*contubernium*), where each of the members undertook to contribute to the formation of the doctrinal principles of the school and where they were mutually dedicated to the imitation of each other. “It is not the school of Epicurus which made Metrodorus, Hermarchus, and Polyaenus great men,” Seneca continues to Lucilius in *Epist.* 6.6, “but living with him (*non schola, sed contubernium*).” According to this line of thought, over time the memory of the followers of Epicurus faded and Epicurus, now credited with the entire philosophical heritage of the school, was presented as the only model to be imitated. In reality, the life of the first generation of members of the Garden passed in this symbiotic unity of powers, which had seen Epicurus, Hermarchus, Metrodorus, and Polyaenus engaged in unison: the “great men (*andres*) who set forth the principles of Epicurean teaching,” as Philodemus defines them.<sup>87</sup>

Much harder to eradicate is the presupposition of doctrinal immobility or standing doctrine, apparently endorsed by Numenius:

They never let themselves be seen as being against Epicurus in any case, but, agreeing that they had been instructed by the sage, they also ostensibly enjoyed the appellation (sc. of wise men) in return for this. From this it arose as a rule for the later Epicureans never to express opposition either to one another or to Epicurus on any matter worth mentioning. On the contrary, they even condemned innovation as indecent, or rather impious. And so no one dares to innovate, but with great peace for them, the dogmas remain fixed under the harmonious agreement that had always there between them. And the school of Epicurus looks like a genuine republic, completely free from divisions, having one common mind and judgment, of which they were and are and seemingly will be faithful followers.<sup>88</sup>

One can speak of ideological uniformity only for early Epicureanism and not for the later stages.<sup>89</sup> The Epicureans, although they considered it an impiety to introduce novelties into their system, nonetheless made modifications in some specific cases, believing that they were offering a correct interpretation of the system. Both “genuine” or “dissident” Epicureans had as their sole goal reading Epicurus through the eyes of Epicurus, but in practice they gave a reading of the Master’s thought with varying degrees of sensitivity, according to the needs and demands of their times.

The reasons for the birth of “dissidence” are to be found in the difficult moments that the school experienced after the death of the *kathēgemonēs*, when free debate was replaced by a culture of book learning that, as such, required exegesis that varied with the changing times and the needs of individual interpreters. Decisive for the definition of this phenomenon is the demarcation that came to be created, with the death of Hermarchus, between the first generation of the Epicureans, the direct students of Epicurus<sup>90</sup> who were considered custodians of the genuine tradition of his teaching and later generations (from Polystratus onwards), engaged with the interpretation of what was now considered the “canon” of the teaching. It would be incorrect to speak of “dissidence” with regard to the generations of Epicureans contemporary with the Masters giving the terms “dissidence” or “heterodoxy” the meaning of denial of specific principles of thought of the *kathēgemonēs* which were held in common. At the foundation of both interpretations of the Epicureans whether “genuine” or “dissident” lies instead the need for an “orthodoxy” which, when examined from the perspective of “dissidents,” is explained by the search for continuity with respect to the founder which was deemed broken in the school. The “dissident” does not direct his criticisms towards Epicurus and his immediate disciples, but towards the tradition which:

In the school, from teacher to teacher, had codified an image of the thought of Epicurus in which the “dissidents” did not see the original meaning of the doctrine reflected.<sup>91</sup>

The concept of “orthodoxy” was therefore perceived by both classes of Epicureans in the same way, but with the difference that while “genuine” Epicureans accepted the development of doctrine as a fact, “dissidents” criticized precisely this codified tradition which, they claimed, did not

reflect the original meaning of the doctrine of Epicurus and his immediate disciples. In other words, we should not interpret the opposition “orthodoxy”/“heterodoxy” as historiographical categories and designate as “heterodox” the person who intends to modify dogmas, a perspective contrary to the spirit of the debate carried out by those dissenting against the scholastic tradition.<sup>92</sup>

Belief in the authenticity of their interpretation of the “canon” allowed Epicureanism to innovate and survive precisely because it led to a progressive and constant development in accordance with the changing times. The mother school of Athens was able to maintain a firm attitude against the dissidents and thus prevented any interference from them in the Garden. In this way, the school kept the doctrinal tenets intact and at the same time also evolved, adapting to the changed times and new historical circumstances.

Philodemus is the principal source from which we know the names and the thought of the Epicurean “dissidents.” Between the second and first century BCE a group of philosophers which is presented under the label of “dissidents” (*sophistai*) lived and was active in the islands of Cos and Rhodes.<sup>93</sup> Nicasicrates and Timasagoras were probably active at Rhodes,<sup>94</sup> but we know nothing of the origins of Antiphanes and Bromius.<sup>95</sup>

We know from the first two books of Philodemus’s *Rhetoric* that Epicureans of Cos and Rhodes (their names are unknown to us) were engaged in the debate on the technicity of rhetoric. Against those Epicureans who maintained that no kind of rhetoric may be considered an art (*technē*), Philodemus claims as authentic doctrine of the *kathēgemonēs* the position of his master Zeno of Sidon, namely that, unlike forensic and political rhetoric, sophistic rhetoric rises to the status of a *technē*. Philodemus proposes, therefore, to refute the view that the definition of sophistic rhetoric as *technē* did not date back to the founders of the Garden, but was an innovation introduced by Zeno.<sup>96</sup>

Nicasicrates was involved in the debate on anger and flattery. Against the interpretation of anger revived by Philodemus which distinguishes between *thumos* (rage) and *physikē orgē* (natural anger) and admits that even the wise can be subject to moments of natural anger but never rage, Nicasicrates denied that the wise are subject to any type of passion, not even *physikē orgē*. As for flattery, Epicurus, though not having taken

flatterers into consideration, admitted that the wise would endeavor to make themselves acceptable to their peers. Nicasicrates criticized this position, but without giving distinct definitions of the various types of flattery, and thus harking back, according to Philodemus, to positions close to those of Democritus.

Timasagoras, who is to be identified with the Timagoras mentioned by Cicero (*Acad.* 2.80) and Aetius (4.13.6; Diels p. 403.22),<sup>97</sup> expressed views about anger similar to those of Nicasicrates, although for different reasons.<sup>98</sup> He was also interested in issues related to the inner workings of perceptual theory.<sup>99</sup>

Antiphanes modified marginal aspects related to the way of life (*diagōgē*) of the gods, aligning himself with positions that seem close to those of the Stoics concerning the problem of the sleep of the gods (at least to what is obtained from a book of Philodemus *On Gods*).

Finally, Bromius, in the debate on the technicity of rhetoric, seems to have privileged political rhetoric over sophistic rhetoric.

## ORGANIZATION AND COMMON LIFE IN THE GARDEN AT ATHENS

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I conclude with a few words on the organization and common life of the Garden of Athens.<sup>100</sup>

The organization of the Garden, at least in the first generations, was founded more than any other philosophical school on principles of emulation, commemoration, and imitation.<sup>101</sup> One of the main objectives taught by Epicureanism was the imitation of the gods by being blessed and imperturbable amid the evils of the world, which entailed, for the members of the school, a constant effort to emulate those who had reached the highest perfection in their imitation of the blessedness of the gods, the four *kathēgemonēs*: Epicurus, Metrodorus, Hermarchus, and Polyaenus.

The school was organized by the *kathēgemonēs* on an ideal model of *contubernium*, in which individuals appeared as many members of a single body. In the Epicurean community everyone, without losing their personal identity, maintained his or her own individuality and undertook to cooperate

with others to achieve their single purpose, happiness. A meticulous hierarchical structure was never developed in which class distinctions were made between *philosophoi*, *philologoi*, *kathēgētai*, and *sunētheis*; there prevailed instead the ideal of frank speech (*parrhēsia*) between teachers and students, which is fundamental in common life, inspired by the educational purposes of *philia*, *charis*, and *eunoia*.<sup>102</sup> Also significant is the openness to women, some of whom (Themista in particular) were actively engaged in philosophical discussion.

The community life of the members of the school, who lived in dwellings built within the Garden, was based on the practice of celebrating together, with festivals and banquets, anniversary rites of Epicurus as well as other friends and family who had died prematurely: the brothers of Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Polyaenus. Already in his will, preserved in Diogenes Laertius (10.16–20), Epicurus had made arrangements for funeral sacrifices for his father, his mother, and brothers, for the celebration of his birthday, and for the monthly meeting that would bring together all the members of the school. Other witnesses supplement the information we have on rites. There are reports of five such rites that were practiced in the Garden.<sup>103</sup> There was the annual funeral rite Epicurus established in memory of his parents and brothers. There were two rites for Epicurus: one annual, the twentieth of Gamelion, his birthday,<sup>104</sup> and one on the twentieth of each month in honor of Epicurus and Metrodorus. Then there was the day dedicated to the memory of the birthday of the brothers of Epicurus, in the month of Poseidon, and finally one for Polyaenus, which fell in the month of Metageitneon.

For the support of members of the Garden, the assets of friends (*philoī*) were held in common. They were constituted by the personal fortunes of individual members, the monetary contributions that came from Lampsacus, and the system of *syntaxeis*—free gifts that had devolved from powerful people (in particular from Mihres, the finance minister of King Lysimachus, a friend of Epicurus) for the benefit of the Garden, sometimes at the behest of Epicurus himself.

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<sup>1</sup> In writing this chapter I take up (with modifications, cuts, updates, and reconsiderations) some of the results that I was able to present in previous research, in particular Dorandi, “Lucrece et les Épicuriens de Campanie,” “Organization and Structure of the Philosophical Schools,” “Le corpus épicurien,” and “Philodemus’ Allegiance to Zeno of Sidon.” The themes treated here are also discussed, with different interpretations, by Clay, “L’épicurisme: école et tradition,” and “The Athenian Garden”; Sedley, “Epicureanism in the Roman Republic”; Erler, “Epicureanism in the Roman Empire”; and Verde, *Epicuro*, 213–24. A useful repertory of actual and presumed Epicureans was edited by Clay, “A Partial Census of Known and Suspected Epicureans,” after Castner, *Prosopography of Roman Epicureans*, which is limited to Roman Epicureans. Verde, *Epicureanism* provides a useful updated list of Epicurean bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> Tepedino Guerra, “L’opera filodemea *Su Epicuro*.”

<sup>3</sup> Militello, *Memorie epicuree*.

<sup>4</sup> Tepedino Guerra, “Il κῆπος epicureo nel *PHerc.* 1780.”

<sup>5</sup> See Goulet, “Épicure de Samos,” 3.158.

<sup>6</sup> Del Mastro, “Per la ricostruzione del I libro del trattato di Filodemo.”

<sup>7</sup> Konstan et al., *Philodemus On Frank Criticism* provides an English translation and notes. A new edition is in preparation by W. B. Henry.

<sup>8</sup> Angeli, “La scuola epicurea di Lampsaco,” 27–51.

<sup>9</sup> *P.Herc.* 1044 + 1746 + 1715. See Gallo, *Frammenti biografici da papiri*, 23–166 and Goulet, “Philonidès de Laodicée.”

<sup>10</sup> A useful list is found in Goulet, “Épicure de Samos,” 3.158–60.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed reconstruction of the life and works of Epicurus, see Goulet, *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques*, 3.154–81. The fragments of Epicurus are collected in Arrighetti, *Epicuro. Opere*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Sedley, “Epicurus and His Professional Rivals,” 135.

<sup>13</sup> The discovery of a new fragment (NF 174) of the inscription of Oinoanda precludes Smith fr. 127 from preserving the remains of a second letter of Epicurus to Hermarchus in which the teacher tried to dissuade the disciple from the studies of rhetoric. See Hammerstaedt-Smith, *The Epicurean Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda*, 95–99.

<sup>14</sup> Erler, “*Epikur, Die Schule Epikurs, Lukrez*,” 287–88.

<sup>15</sup> The victim of a shipwreck in a letter by Diogenes of Oinoanda (fr. 72 Smith) is not Epicurus as Clay, “Sailing to Lampsacus,” 49–59 suggests, but a lesser known Niceratus.

<sup>16</sup> Hermarch. Longo Auricchio fr. 2 = Epic. Arrighetti<sup>2</sup> fr. 261. Cf. DL 10.10.

<sup>17</sup> Sedley, “Epicurus and the Mathematicians of Cyzicus,” 23–56. We do not know whether this crisis is to be linked with the nearby school of Cyzicus, founded by Eudoxus of Cnidus. Podolak, “Questioni pitoclee,” 45–55 denies the existence of a school of Eudoxus in Cyzicus.

<sup>18</sup> See Angeli, “Timocratès de Lampsaque.”

<sup>19</sup> See Spinelli and Verde, *Epicuro. Epistola a Erodoto*.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Bollack and Laks, *Épicure à Pythoclès*, 45–55.

<sup>21</sup> See Heßler, *Epikur Brief an Menoikeus*.

<sup>22</sup> The most recent editions are those of Marcovich, *Diogenes Laertius. Vitae Philosophorum*, 802–13: *Key Doctrines*, and 815–26: *Vatican Sayings*; and Dorandi, *Diogenes Laertius. Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 814–24: *Key Doctrines*.

<sup>23</sup> To be assigned to Metrodorus are at least SV 10, 30–31, 47, and 51. SV 51 is taken from a letter of Metrodorus addressed to Pythocles on the damages and pleasures of sexual intercourse. Cf. Dorandi, “Aspetti della tradizione ‘gnomologica’ di Epicuro e degli epicurei,” 273–74.

<sup>24</sup> In addition to cases in which *Key Doctrines* overlap with the *Vatican Sayings*, Diogenes also quoted SV 33.

<sup>25</sup> Dorandi, “Aspetti della tradizione ‘gnomologica’ di Epicuro e degli epicurei,” 271–88.

<sup>26</sup> Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, 94–133; Leone, “Epicuro fondatore del Giardino,” 21–33; and Dorandi, *Modi e modelli di trasmissione*.

<sup>27</sup> See Leone, *Epicuro: Sulla natura, Libro II*; and Maso and Masi, *Epicurus on eidola*.

<sup>28</sup> For the text we still rely upon the edition of Arrighetti, *Epicuro. Opere* [25]. New fragments are added in Arrighetti and Gigante, “Frammenti del libro undicesimo *Della natura* di Epicuro.” Sedley, “Epicurus and the Mathematicians of Cyzicus,” 31–42 proposes a revised edition of some columns.

<sup>29</sup> Leone, “Epicuro, *Della natura*, libro XIV” and “La chiusa del XIV libro *Della natura* di Epicuro.”

<sup>30</sup> Millot, “Épicure, *De la nature*, livre XV.” See Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, 123–27.

<sup>31</sup> Laursen, “The Early Parts of Epicurus, *On Nature*, 25th Book” and “The Later Parts of Epicurus, *On Nature*, 25th Book.” Cf. Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, from whom the quotation is taken (61).

<sup>32</sup> Sedley, “Epicurus, *On Nature*, Book XXVIII.”

- <sup>33</sup> Leone, "Epicuro, *Della natura*, libro XXXIV (PHerc. 1431)."
- <sup>34</sup> Cantarella and Arrighetti, "Il libro *Sul tempo*"; and Arrighetti, *Epicuro. Opere* [37]. See Del Mastro, "PHerc. 1416, cr. 5," 27–32.
- <sup>35</sup> One must still rely on Körte, *Metrodori Epicurei fragmenta* for the text of the fragments, although a new edition is in preparation, on which see Tepedino Guerra, "La Scuola di Epicuro," 40–44.
- <sup>36</sup> Tepedino Guerra, "Il contributo di Metrodoro di Lampsaco."
- <sup>37</sup> Porter, "ΦΥΣΙΟΛΟΓΕΙΝ. Nausiphanes of Teos and the Physics of Rhetoric," and Blank, "Atomistic Rhetoric in Philodemus."
- <sup>38</sup> Spinelli, "Metrodoro *Contro i Dialettici*?"
- <sup>39</sup> Tepedino Guerra, "Metrodoro *Contro i Dialettici*?" Cf. Dorandi, *Epicureanism and Socraticism*, 174–76, and Fleischer, "Die ältesten Papyri Herkulaneums."
- <sup>40</sup> Sanders, "Toward a New Edition of PHerc. 831."
- <sup>41</sup> The fragments are collected in Longo Auricchio, *Ermarco. Frammenti*.
- <sup>42</sup> Rispoli, "Empedocle nelle testimonianze ermarchee."
- <sup>43</sup> Cf. Blank and Longo Auricchio, "Ermarco contro Alessino."
- <sup>44</sup> Cf. Longo Auricchio, *Ermarco. Frammenti*, 137–45.
- <sup>45</sup> The fragments are collected in Tepedino Guerra, *Polieno. Frammenti*. See Tepedino Guerra, "La Scuola di Epicuro." On Demetrius's title, see Dorandi, "Due titoli di papiri ercolanesi," 29–30.
- <sup>46</sup> Indelli, "Colote di Lampsaco," 45–48; Kechagia, *Plutarch against Colotes*; and Corti, *L'Adversus Colotem di Plutarco*. A collection of his fragments does not exist.
- <sup>47</sup> It was Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemos*, 130 who discerned this title in Philodemus *De adul.* (P. Herc. 1457) Bassi col. 10.16–17, but both the title and the attribution have been disputed. See Kechagia, *Plutarch against Colotes*, 53 n. 23; Erler, "Epikur, Die Schule Epikurs, Lukrez," 239–40.
- <sup>48</sup> Capasso, *Carneisco. Il secondo libro del Filista*.
- <sup>49</sup> The two works are published, respectively, by Indelli, *Polistrato*, and Capasso, "L'opera polistratea *Sulla filosofia*." Cf. Indelli, "Colote di Lampsaco," 48–52.
- <sup>50</sup> See De Sanctis, "Il filosofo e il re", Netz, "Were There Epicurean Mathematicians?," and Verde, "Ancora sulla matematica epicurea."
- <sup>51</sup> Haake, *Der Philosoph in der Stadt*, 300.
- <sup>52</sup> The biography preserved by a Herculaneum papyrus (see above, n. 9), though quite fragmentary, grants us some information about his life and works. For the epistles, see P.Herc. 1044 fr. 14.3–10.
- <sup>53</sup> Strabo 14.2.20 (658 C).
- <sup>54</sup> Editions of individual texts are listed in Dorandi, "Démétrios Lacon," 637–41; and Erler, "Epikur, Die Schule Epikurs, Lukrez," 256–65. See also Clay, "The Philosophical Writings of Demetrius of Laconia."
- <sup>55</sup> The fragments are collected in Angeli and Colaizzo, "I frammenti di Zenone Sidonio." See also Angeli, "Zénon de Sidon."
- <sup>56</sup> Verde, *Elachista*, 299–306.
- <sup>57</sup> For this perspective on Philodemus, cf. Erler, "Orthodoxie und Anpassung."
- <sup>58</sup> The case of Philodemus is not unique. From the second century BCE there had been examples of philosophers, Epicurean or otherwise, who had left Athens, which was already in decline, and opened schools or taught in outlying areas. The Stoic philosophy was flourishing on the island of Rhodes in particular with Panaetius and Posidonius. Also at Rhodes we perhaps find the two Epicurean "dissidents," Nicasicrates and Timasagoras. The Epicurean Demetrius Laco was active in Miletus,

where he probably opened a school parallel to that of Athens. See Dorandi, “Philodemus’ Allegiance to Zeno of Sidon.” According to Sedley, “Philodemus and the Decentralisation of Philosophy,” 31–41: “The diaspora . . . had certainly started before the crucial years 88–86 BC, which constitute the *climax* of the decentralisation process” (34). The continuity of the Epicurean school at Rhodes is probably also attested by Diogenes of Oenoanda (Smith fr. 62 and 122) as well as perhaps the bilingual inscription of the Epicurean philosopher Eucratis of Rhodes (*ILS* 7780 = *Syll.*<sup>3</sup> 1227 = *CIL* IX 48 = *IGR* I 466 = *IG* XIV 674, only with the Greek text) discovered at Brindisi.

<sup>59</sup> The scholarchate of Phaedrus is confirmed by the testimony of Phlegon of Tralles (*FGrHist* 257 F 12 § 8). See Dorandi, “Phèdre d’Athènes.”

<sup>60</sup> I discuss the history of the Garden at this time and Philodemus’s decision to leave Athens for Italy in Dorandi, “Philodemus’ Allegiance to Zeno of Sidon.”

<sup>61</sup> Vesperini, *La Philosophia et ses pratiques d’Ennius à Cicéron* provides an intelligent reading, but is not always convincing of the issue of the spread of Epicureanism in Rome. See Dorandi, “‘Pratiche’ della *philosophia* nella Roma repubblicana.”

<sup>62</sup> Sider, *The Epigrams of Philodemos*. Cf. Gigante, *Il libro degli Epigrammi di Filodemo*.

<sup>63</sup> For a presentation of the life and works of Philodemus and the library at Herculaneum, see Capasso’s chapter in this volume, and Blank, “Philodemus.” Henry, *Herculaneum Papyri* provides a useful list of bibliography on the Herculaneum Papyri.

<sup>64</sup> In *P.Herc.* Angeli 1005 col. 14.6–9, Philodemus defines himself thus: “While Zeno was alive I was his faithful admirer and, after death, his indefatigable praiser, especially of all his virtues based on possession of the doctrine of Epicurus, inspired by the gods.” See Del Mastro, “Filodemo e la lode di Zenone Sidonio.”

<sup>65</sup> Sedley, “Philosophical Allegiance in the Greco-Roman World,” 103–105.

<sup>66</sup> Zeno of Sidon, Angeli-Colaizzo fr. 23 (see also fr. 16, the subscription of an uncertain work of the same Philodemus, transmitted by *P.Herc.* 1389).

<sup>67</sup> On the formula ἀπὸ φωνῆς, see Richard, “ἀπὸ φωνῆς,” and the further bibliography in Dorandi, *Nell’officina dei classici*, 62 n. 79.

<sup>68</sup> Erler, “Orthodoxie und Anpassung” and “*Epikur, Die Schule Epikurs, Lukrez*,” 339–43.

<sup>69</sup> On the likely reason preventing the succession of Philodemus to Zeno, see Dorandi, “Philodemus’ Allegiance to Zeno of Sidon.”

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Erler, “*Epikur, Die Schule Epikurs, Lukrez*,” 274–75. The fragments were collected by Gigante, “I frammenti di Sirone.”

<sup>71</sup> On Lucretius see Gale’s chapter in this volume.

<sup>72</sup> Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*.

<sup>73</sup> This thesis has been criticized, especially by Montarese, *Lucretius and His Sources*, but with arguments that do not seem decisive. See Dorandi, “Review of Montarese, *Lucretius and His Sources*.”

<sup>74</sup> See also the successive letters of Hadrian to the Epicureans at Athens: *SEG* III 226 + *IG*<sup>2</sup> 1097.

<sup>75</sup> See Dorandi, “Plotina, Adriano e gli Epicurei di Atene”; and Van Bremen, “Plotina to All Her Friends.” On this last contribution, I agree with the remarks of Follet, “Bulletin Épigraphique 2007,” nr. 231. See Dorandi, “The School and Texts of Epicurus in the Early Centuries of the Roman Empire.”

<sup>76</sup> See Fleisher, *Dionysios von Alexandria, De natura* (περὶ φύσεως).

<sup>77</sup> Gercke, “Chrysippea,” 701–702 proved that Diogenianus was an Epicurean.

<sup>78</sup> Isnardi Parente, “Diogeniano, gli Epicurei et la τύχη”; and Hammerstaedt, “Das Kriterium der Prolepsis beim Epikureer Diogenian.”



<sup>79</sup> The story of Epicureanism in Syria is traced by Smith, “An Epicurean Priest from Apamea in Syria,” 122–25.

<sup>80</sup> Smith, “An Epicurean Priest from Apamea in Syria.” The dating of the Hadrianic era, proposed by Smith, is called into question by Gatier, “Bulletin Épigraphique 1997,” nr. 639: the nomen Aurelius goes back to a date “at the least after 163.”

<sup>81</sup> On Diogenes of Oinoanda, see Hammerstaedt’s chapter in this volume. The standard edition is that of Smith, *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* with supplements in Smith, *Supplement to Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription*. New fragments have been published by Hammerstaedt and Smith, *The Epicurean Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda*.

<sup>82</sup> The different interpretations of the passage are analyzed by Angeli, *Filodemo. Agli amici di scuola*, 82–92.

<sup>83</sup> Sedley, “Philosophical Allegiance in the Greco-Roman World,” 97–103, and Dorandi, “Philodemus’ Allegiance to Zeno of Sidon.”

<sup>84</sup> Sedley, “Philosophical Allegiance in the Greco-Roman World,” 103–107.

<sup>85</sup> Erler, “*Philologia medicans*.” Cf. Ferrario, “La nascita della filologia epicurea”; and Del Mastro, “Demetrio Lacone e la correzione.”

<sup>86</sup> The best treatment of the problem remains that of Angeli, *Filodemo. Agli amici di scuola*, 82–102. I repropose her conclusions. Useful thoughts for a reassessment of the idea and history of “dissidence” are found in Verde, “Ancora su Timasagora epicureo.”

<sup>87</sup> Philodemus *On Rhetoric* 2 (*P.Herc.* 1674) Longo col. 27.14–16.

<sup>88</sup> Numenius, *Des Places* fr. 24.22–36 (in *Eus. P.E.* 14.5.3).

<sup>89</sup> Angeli, *Filodemo*, 85.

<sup>90</sup> Philodemus *P.Herc.* 1005, Angeli fr. 90.7–8 “and compare the opinions of those who had heard Epicurus (τῶν ἀκηκοῦτων Ἐπικούρου)—to such an extent in meaning, and if not [that], in purpose and readiness, they become one and the same with the thought of Epicurus” and fr. 107.9–16 “we compare the way of speaking (τρόπος) of those who have published systematic treatises after the death of Hermarchus, or, if one wishes, even after the departure of all the Epicureans who had heard Epicurus (τῶν Ἐπικούρου διακηκοῦτων ἀπάντων).” See Angeli, *Filodemo*, 97–98.

<sup>91</sup> Angeli, *Filodemo*, 93.

<sup>92</sup> Angeli, *Filodemo*, 84.

<sup>93</sup> Philodemus *Rh.* 2 (*P.Herc.* 1674) Longo Auricchio cols. 52.11–53.33. See Sedley, “Philodemus and the Decentralisation of Philosophy,” 33.

<sup>94</sup> On the basis of fr. Ilb 3–4 of *P.Herc.* 1746, published by Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemos*, 92, it is probable that Nicasicrates was the head of a school, perhaps that of Rhodes, but this is the only testimonium to that effect. Furthermore, if one accepts the conjecture of Gallo, *Frammenti biografici da papiri*, 89 and 161–62 in a fragment of the *Life of Philonides* (*P.Herc.* 1044 fr. 34.5–6) Timasagoras too may have been the head of a school, perhaps at Athens. See Procopé, “Epicureans on Anger,” 379.

<sup>95</sup> Erler, “*Epikur, Die Schule Epikurs, Lukrez*,” 285–86.

<sup>96</sup> See Erbi, “La retorica nell’Epicureismo.”

<sup>97</sup> He was rather an Epicurean who incurred the dislike of Epicurean contemporaries, who have probably influenced the accounts that have come down to us.

<sup>98</sup> Indelli, *Filodemo. L’ira*, 154 and 224; Procopé, “Epicureans on Anger,” 377–86; Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, 202–209.

<sup>99</sup> Verde, “Ancora su Timasagora epicureo” maintains that one cannot assert that Timasagoras was truly an Epicurean “dissident.” See also Verde, “Timasagoras de Rhodes.”

<sup>100</sup> The numerous testimonia are collected and discussed by Clay, “Individual and Community,” 264–70.

<sup>101</sup> On the organization and structure of the Garden and other schools, see Dorandi, “Organization and Structure of the Philosophical Schools,” 55–62.

<sup>102</sup> We learn as much, in particular, from Philodemus’s *On Frank Criticism*, according to the interpretation of Gigante, *Ricerche Filodemee*, 110–13; and Clay, “Individual and Community,” 269–70.

<sup>103</sup> Clay, “The Cults of Epicurus.”

<sup>104</sup> We find traces of this rite in Italy in the first century BCE in an epigram of Philodemus dedicated to his patron, L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus (Sider, *The Epigrams of Philodemos*, 27).



## CHAPTER 2

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# EPISTEMOLOGY

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GISELA STRIKER

EPICURUS was perhaps the first Greek philosopher who found it useful or necessary to begin the exposition of his natural philosophy with a chapter on epistemology. He had set aside the part labeled logic or dialectic, the theory of reasoning and argument, along with its technical terminology, as a superfluous distraction (DL 10.31) and replaced it by a treatise on how to find and establish the truth.

By the end of the fourth century BCE, the question whether philosophers or scientists could establish the truth of their theories had become more pressing than ever. The senses, which offer apparently conflicting evidence, had been rejected as a source of reliable information by earlier cosmologists. But the theories of the philosophers, allegedly based on reason, had also been challenged by Pyrrho, an older contemporary of Epicurus, because they contradicted one another just as much as evidence provided by the various senses. Even Epicurus's predecessor in atomism, Democritus, had expressed deep pessimism about the possibility of attaining knowledge. He had accepted the impossibility of deciding which among the conflicting sense impressions might be true, but at the same time acknowledged the senses as our basic source of information about the

world, expressing the dilemma in the vivid image of a dialogue between the mind and the senses, in which the senses address the mind by saying:

Wretched mind! Do you take your evidence from us and then overthrow us? Our overthrow is your downfall.<sup>1</sup>

Epicurus had to show a way out of this dilemma, and he did so in a treatise (now lost) entitled *Canon* or *About the Criterion* that served as introduction to his natural philosophy. His work was obviously influential, and for several centuries after Epicurus's epistemology was discussed by the Hellenistic philosophical schools alongside logic—for those who did not reject it—in terms of the question of the criterion or criteria of truth.

## THE CRITERIA

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The word “criterion”—literally, instrument of judgment—had been used occasionally by Plato and Aristotle to refer to a cognitive faculty, either reason or the senses. This usage continued throughout the Hellenistic period, including in Epicurus's own writings, and did not belong to any particular school.<sup>2</sup> Thus Epicurus speaks of criteria in this sense when he urges repeatedly that the student of nature must consider the available evidence from all the criteria, both the mind and the senses (*Ep. Hdt.* 38; 82). Epicurus's innovation consisted in speaking of criteria of truth as a means of determining or deciding about the truth of beliefs or scientific theses. He had probably taken over the title *Canon* from Democritus, who wrote a work entitled *Canons*, but Epicurus may have been the first to take literally the metaphor implied by the word. A canon (ὁ κανών) was a mason's rule or straightedge, an instrument used to determine the straightness of walls or beams, etc. This instrument had to be straight itself to serve as the standard of straightness for other things. Following this model, Epicurus designated as criteria of truth the kinds of basic or irrefutable truths that could serve to assess the truth of beliefs.

Diogenes Laertius introduces the three letters of Epicurus he transcribed in the last book of his work by a brief summary of the *Canon*. Not surprisingly, it suggests that the treatise was mainly concerned to argue for the truth of Epicurus's criteria (DL 10.31–32):

In the *Canon*, Epicurus says that the criteria of truth are sensations, preconceptions, and feelings (the Epicureans also include the applications of the mind to an impression) . . . .<sup>3</sup> For, he says, all sense perception is irrational and does not accommodate memory. For neither is it moved by itself, nor when moved by something else is it able to add or subtract anything. Nor is there anything that can refute the senses: neither can like sense refute like, because of their equal validity, nor unlike unlike, since they are not judges of the same things; nor can reason, since all reason depends on the senses; nor can an individual sensation refute another, since we pay attention to all of them.<sup>4</sup>

The first argument emphasizes the passivity of the senses: they can only receive or register what moves them, but neither add nor omit anything. This in itself would not be enough to show that the information they receive must be correct, but the mention of memory indicates what Epicurus had in mind: memory is a function of thought, not of perception, and it may be used to modify the incoming information. By separating the contributions of sensation to perceptual judgments from those of memory, Epicurus could explain what others would describe as perceptual errors. Instead of rejecting a sense impression as false, one should distinguish between what is already given and the modifications one has inadvertently made, leading to a false belief. As Epicurus puts it succinctly in *Key Doctrine* 24 (DL 10.147):

If you reject any single sense impression absolutely and do not distinguish in an opinion between what is still awaited and what is already present according to sensation and feelings and any application of the mind to an impression, you will throw into confusion even your other sensations by your foolish opinion, so that you will be rejecting the criterion altogether.<sup>5</sup>

The distinction between the actual content of a sensation and a perceptual judgment based on it allowed Epicurus to deny the claim that the senses offer conflicting evidence. According to him, individual sensations provide only partial information about external objects; this information is correct, but it may not be sufficient to justify a judgment about the object. So, for example, a tower looks small and round when seen from afar, though one may find out that it is actually square and large when one comes closer. An oar seen through water does look crooked even though one knows that it is straight. The sound of a trumpet is not as loud coming from far away as it would be if one were standing next to the trumpeter, and so on. These are familiar facts about sense perception—and indeed the argument from conflicting appearances would not have been so successful if people had not been familiar with them. But people quickly learn to adjust their judgments

to the circumstances, taking into account their distance from the tower, or the fact that the oar is seen through water, and suspending judgment when they realize that they do not have enough information. The alleged contradictions arise only on the level of perceptual judgment, because we are prone to forming such beliefs based on very little information. Again, this is not surprising, since things observed nearby under normal conditions tend to be just as they are perceived to be. One might therefore be inclined to go in the direction the Stoics took by trying to distinguish true from false sense impressions. But as Democritus and others had already argued, this will not work, since there is no standard of judgment above the senses.

The next argument in Diogenes's summary of the *Canon* repeats this point and also emphasizes the limitations of sensation. The claim that the senses cannot refute one another because they do not judge the same things can only hold with respect to the proper sensibles—color, shape, and motion for sight, sound for hearing, hardness and softness for touch, and so on (see Lucr. *DRN* 4.486–99). If something looks like honey, but then turns out to taste and smell like soap, one might argue that the senses of taste and smell have refuted sight; but it is still true that the thing has the color of honey, and that is all that the eyes could tell one.

Here Epicurus seems to endorse the most restrictive conception of sense perception advocated by Plato in the *Theaetetus* (184B–186E). A passage in Lucretius's long discussion of optical illusions confirms this. Lucretius has just explained that the shadow may appear to be an object that follows the body around, but that it seems to move only because the moving body is blocking light in different places. Yet this does not show that the eyes deceive us—it is up to the mind, not the eyes, to determine whether the shadow is a single moving thing or just the result of the body blocking the light (*DRN* 4.379–87). But unlike Plato in the *Theaetetus*, who goes on to argue that there is no truth to be found in the senses, Epicurus insists that reason cannot refute the senses, since it is entirely dependent on them. For, as Diogenes explains a few lines further down (DL 10.32):

All our notions also derive from the senses, by encounter or analogy or similarity or composition, with some contribution from the mind as well.

A true perceptual judgment such as “this is honey” will then be the result of an “application of the mind”—an act of attention to the content of many

sensations that leads to a complex impression.

Epicurus's second criterion, the preconceptions (*προλήψεις*), is described by Diogenes in a rambling paragraph that uses terminology from various schools (DL 10.33):

Preconception, they say, is as it were a cognition (*κατάληψις*), or a correct opinion, or conception, or universal notion stored inside, that is, a memory of what has frequently appeared from outside, e.g., "Such and such a thing is a man." For as soon as the word "man" is uttered, immediately its outline also comes to mind by means of preconception, the senses leading the way. Thus what primarily underlies each name is something evident. And we would not inquire about the things we investigate if we had not had prior knowledge of them. For example, "Is what's standing over there a horse or a cow?" For one must at some time have come to know the form of a horse and of a cow by means of preconception. Nor would we have named something if we had not previously learnt its outline by means of preconception.<sup>6</sup>

Diogenes's attempt to capture the sense of the word "preconception" with many different terms no doubt reflects the fact that Epicurus did not like to give definitions; but it also incidentally shows that by the time of Diogenes Laertius, a rich vocabulary was available to describe what he had in mind. General concepts played a role in the theories of all the Hellenistic schools, though their origin and epistemological status was seen in different ways. According to Cicero (*ND* 1.44), the term *prolepsis* was introduced by Epicurus himself. The prefix "pro-" indicates that these concepts must be grasped prior to something else, and this in two different ways.

First, general concepts are associated with words and must be known before one can understand or use the corresponding word. In this role, the preconceptions do not function as criteria of truth, since general terms are used in true and false statements alike. In fact, these concepts presumably furnish the mind with the memories it sometimes uses to modify the content of a sensation to arrive at an erroneous perceptual judgment.

The role of preconceptions in investigations, illustrated by Diogenes with the rather trivial example of a horse or cow, is explained by Epicurus himself at the beginning of the *Letter to Herodotus* (*Ep. Hdt.* 37–38):

First, then, Herodotus, we must grasp the things which underlie words, so that we may have a reference point against which to judge matters of opinion, inquiry and puzzlement, and not have everything indiscriminated for ourselves as we attempt infinite chains of proofs, or have words which are empty. For the primary concept corresponding to each word must be seen and need no additional proof, if we are going to have a reference point for matters of inquiry, puzzlement and opinion.<sup>7</sup>

The preconceptions represent Epicurus's solution to the notorious puzzle raised in Plato's *Meno* (80D): how can you investigate something if you do not know at all what it is? The answer consists in a distinction: we must indeed know what it is that we are investigating in the sense of understanding the corresponding word, but this is not the same as having an expert's knowledge of its nature. This understanding must be given at the start of an investigation and not require any proof, since such a requirement would involve us in an infinite regress, or else we would be left with meaningless words. The suggestion that one must understand the terms one uses probably also comes from the *Meno* (see 75B–76A). But Epicurus adds that this pre-existing knowledge must also serve as a reference point for the results of an investigation. Here he is introducing a label for a practice that was (and is) common among philosophers: our conception of a thing sets adequacy conditions for possible accounts of its nature. A theory of the soul, for example, must explain how it enables animals to move and to perceive, and will be rejected if it implies consequences incompatible with our initial assumptions. In this sense, then, the preconceptions function as criteria.

Aristotle counts such presuppositions among what he calls *phainomena* or *endoxa*—generally accepted beliefs, including facts of observation. Epicurus reserved the term phenomena (*φαινόμενα*) for perceptual observations. This is a useful clarification in contrast to Aristotle, whose wide class of phenomena included common opinions, empirical observations, and even the views of philosophers. But the comparison with Aristotle may also cast some doubt on Epicurus's claim that the preconceptions must not only be accepted without further proof, but also themselves be evident truths. The argument here seems to be the same as in the case of sense impression: we have no higher standard to which we could appeal to establish the truth of our preconceptions, and therefore we must accept them all as true. Now it is surely correct to insist that some of the assumptions that underlie our use of general terms must be kept constant—it will not do, for instance, to claim that cows are made by sculptors, or that numbers can walk. However, this does not rule out the possibility that a scientific investigation might end up modifying our initial conception. A trivial example of this would be that whales, according to the zoologists, are mammals, not fish. Here one might say that the common conception of fish is wider and less precise than the scientific one. But it is probably no

surprise that Epicurus's most famous theological thesis, according to which anger and concern about human affairs are incompatible with the preconception of the gods as blessed and immortal beings, did not find many adherents outside the Epicurean school, even though his physical explanations of phenomena like thunder and lightning might have had some effect on superstitious beliefs in supernatural powers.

In the case of the sensations, Epicurus could eventually try to vindicate his claim that they are all true by offering explanations of optical illusions or different sensations of taste in terms of atomism. In cases of concepts like those of the gods or of justice—concepts that obviously involve some contributions of the mind, not just perceptual observation—this kind of explanation was not available. The evidence provided by preconceptions, even if they are formed on the basis of true perceptions, is more limited than Epicurus seems to have assumed.

The third kind of criterion consists in the feelings of pleasure or pain, described by Diogenes as criteria of choice and avoidance rather than of truth. This is indeed their role in Epicurean ethics, but several passages in the *Letter to Herodotus* show that they also functioned as criteria of truth. They are usually mentioned alongside the sensations and presumably have the same role, except that they are impressions of bodily states rather than of external objects. “Pleasure” and “pain” are used as generic terms not only for physical affections, but also for positive or negative emotions such as joy, fear, or anger. Diogenes's error is understandable, since pleasure and pain are primarily mentioned as showing what is good or bad for a person, though Epicurus emphasizes that this does not mean that everything pleasant is to be pursued or everything painful to be avoided. Like the sensations, they do not reveal the nature of the states that cause them. What brings about the pleasant life is not the enjoyment of luxuries, but “sober reasoning that seeks out the causes of all choice and avoidance” (*Ep. Men.* 132). The greatest pleasure, according to Epicurus, consists in the absence of all pain and distress, but it takes philosophy to find this out. In the context of Epicurus's philosophy of nature, the feelings can be subsumed under perception, as indeed they seem to be in some later sources.<sup>8</sup>

Epicurus's account of the criteria and their truth offers a sophisticated theory of the relations between the two cognitive faculties, reason or thought (*διάνοια*) and the senses. Sense perception is the foundation of all knowledge because it is the only way we can come in contact with the



world around us. But the information furnished by the senses may seem confusing and even self-contradictory. This led philosophers to the argument from conflicting appearances, and to the contempt expressed by many of Epicurus's predecessors for perceptual beliefs. Democritus had insisted on the fundamental role of the senses, but he had also apparently accepted the conclusion that they offer conflicting information, and hence cannot reveal the truth. Epicurus's response was different: though he agreed that we have no higher faculty that could distinguish between true and false sense impressions, he distinguished, like Plato, between sensations and perceptual judgments and argued that we should recognize the limitations of the senses. We need to use reason to organize the information we receive through the senses, and also to understand the way the sense organs are functioning. Memory is needed for the formation of general concepts and the development of language to communicate what we experience. Concepts are formed by the mind from a multitude of sense impressions, usually from several senses. Even a simple concept like that of a cow or horse includes not only the visual appearance of those animals, but also the facts that they move, eat grass, make characteristic noises, and so on. These concepts are not separately existing abstract objects like Platonic Forms, accessible only to thought. Reason therefore remains dependent on the senses both for the formation of its concepts and for observations of the natural world. But, as Lucretius puts it, "the eyes cannot take cognizance of the real nature of things" (*DRN* 4.385). The discovery of the causes and explanations of natural phenomena—in particular, of course, the concepts of atoms and void—is the domain of the mind.

This theory itself is independent of atomism—as should be expected if it was to serve as the epistemological foundation of Epicurus's philosophy of nature. However, at this point we must take a look at a rival interpretation of Epicurus's thesis about the truth of sense impressions that came up in antiquity. In Sextus Empiricus's report on Epicurus's epistemology (*M.* 7.203–16) we find the following (*S.E. M.* 7.206–209):

But some are deceived by the difference between the impressions which seem to be derived from the same object of sense—for instance a visible object—because of which the object appears of another color or of another shape, or altered in some other way. For they have supposed that of the impressions thus differing and conflicting, one of them must be true and the opposing one false. This is silly, characteristic of people who do not understand the nature of things. For it is not the whole solid body that is seen—to base our argument on objects of sight—but the color of the solid body. And of the color, some is on the solid body

itself, as when one sees things from close up or from a moderate distance, and some is outside the solid body and exists in the adjacent spaces, as in the case of things seen from a great distance. And this is altered in the intervening space and takes on its own shape, which produces an impression corresponding to what it really is like.

And just as neither the sound in the brass instrument that is struck, nor the sound in the mouth of the man who shouts, is what we hear, but the sound that reaches our sense; and just as no one says that the person who hears a faint sound from a distance is mishearing because, on coming close, the same sound is perceived as louder—so I would not say that vision is deceived because it sees the tower as small and round from a great distance, but from close at hand as larger and square. Rather, I would say that it is telling the truth because when the object of sense appears to it small and of that shape, it really is small and of that shape, since the edges of the images are rubbed away as they travel through the air; and again when it appears large and of a different shape, it is correspondingly large and of a different shape, since it is no longer the same object that is both at once. For it is left to the distorted opinion to believe that the object of vision seen from close at hand is the same as that seen from a distance.<sup>9</sup>

This argument is obviously based on Epicurus's theory of perception. He held that the perceptions of the distance senses—vision, hearing, and smell—are caused by atomic films or emanations constantly streaming from the surfaces of things. In the case of vision, these “images” (εἰδωλα) may be damaged or distorted when coming from a longer distance, and hence produce impressions different from those received close at hand. In the last lines of this passage, it turns out that the objects of vision are taken to be those images themselves rather than the objects from which they come, and the truth of sense impressions is thus guaranteed by their correspondence to the images. This might look like a short cut to truth, but of course it means that what we perceive is not the external object we normally take it to be.

Contrast this with Lucretius's explicit statement at *DRN* 4.256–58:

In this connection, you should not consider it strange that, although the images that impinge on our eyes are not visible, the objects themselves are seen.

In other words, the images are the means of perception, not its objects. Lucretius, the faithful Epicurean, is more likely than Sextus to report Epicurus's doctrine accurately, and a passage in Plutarch's treatise *Against Colotes* (1121B–D) may actually show how the rival interpretation arose.

Plutarch claims that Colotes was unwilling to accept the consequences of the view that all sense impressions are true—namely the doctrine of the Cyrenaics, according to which we can only perceive our own affections (πάθη):

For those who say that when we encounter a round image, or another one that is bent, the sense receives a true impression, but will not let it declare as well that the tower is round or the oar is bent, insist on their own affections and appearances, but will not agree that the external objects are like that . . . .

Imagining a dialogue, Plutarch then has an Epicurean say:

By Zeus, but when I come closer to the tower or touch the oar, I will declare that the oar is straight, the tower angular, whereas this man [sc. the Cyrenaic] will only agree that it seems and appears so, even when he gets close.

Plutarch replies:

By Zeus indeed—for he is better at seeing and preserving the consequences of the claim that every sense impression alike is trustworthy in itself, and none more than any other, but to an equal degree.

Plutarch obviously thinks that the Epicurean is taking the impression received near the tower to be more reliable than the one received from a distance, and hence goes against his own principle. But this is to misunderstand the Epicurean view about the limitations of sense perception. The impression one receives from afar is vague: as Lucretius puts it, “they [the towers] do not look like objects close at hand that are really round, but resemble them in a shadowy fashion” (*DRN* 4.362–63), and so an Epicurean would refrain from making a judgment about the exact shape of the tower while he can only see it from a distance. That is the point of the distinction between what is already present and what is still awaited. One might perhaps say that one sees a tower in the distance, but that one cannot yet discern its shape. Lucretius admits that it may be difficult to observe the distinction, and so people will sometimes make mistakes, but the error lies in the judgment of the mind, not in the sense impression (*DRN* 4.466–67):

Nothing is more difficult than to separate patent facts from the dubious opinions that our mind at once adds of its own accord.

It is understandable that superficial or hostile readers of Epicurus would take his theory of perception as evidence for the truth of sense impressions, but this reverses the order of the argument. Epicurus argues for the existence of the images that reach the eye in order to explain the functioning of the sense organs (see, e.g., *Ep. Hdt.* 46–48), and he assumes

that those images may be damaged or distorted in order to explain why things look different when observed from different distances. These differences between impressions are among the phenomena a scientific theory must seek to explain—as science does to this day, though not in Epicurean terms.

It is better, then, to side with the faithful Epicurean, Lucretius. Epicurus's theory can be best understood as a response to the problems raised by his predecessors who seemed to despair of the senses as a source of knowledge. And Epicurus in fact agrees with one of the less pessimistic statements ascribed to Democritus. Here is Sextus quoting from Democritus's *Canons*:

These are his words: "Of knowledge (γνώμη) there are two forms, the one legitimate, the other bastard; and to the bastard belong all these: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch. And the other is legitimate, and separated from that." Then preferring the legitimate to the bastard, he continues: "When the bastard can no longer see anything smaller, or hear, or smell, or taste, or perceive by touch . . . (\*but more fine\*)."

Thus according to him too, reason, which he calls legitimate knowledge, is a criterion (S.E. M. 7.139).<sup>10</sup>

The text is corrupt at the end of the second quotation, but it seems clear that Democritus went on to say that reason, the legitimate form of knowledge, must take over, for example, to discover that the world is made up of atoms and void.

We do not know whether Democritus had found a way to answer his own reproach of the senses I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, but Epicurus, as I have tried to show, did so.

Epicurus's *Canon* was intended as an introduction to the science of nature, and he was surely right to insist that perceptual observation is indispensable. Even though it might be difficult to avoid perceptual errors in individual cases, the "manifest facts" (φαινόμενα) to which he appealed in his physics were not individual sense impressions. One does not need to look for a special type of sense impression that is infallibly correct, as the Stoics did; it is enough, as Epicurus says many times, to pay attention to all the available evidence.

## SCIENTIFIC METHOD

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At the beginning of the *Letter to Herodotus*, Epicurus reminds Herodotus of the rules to keep in mind for a scientific inquiry: first, it must be clear “what underlies words,” that is, one must have grasped the preconceptions that belong to the subject under inquiry; this was discussed above. The next rule indicates how the evidence furnished by the cognitive faculties must be used to construct opinions or theories about things not accessible to direct observation:

Second, we should observe everything in accordance with the sense impressions and in general the present applications of the mind or of any of the discriminatory faculties, and likewise also in accordance with the feelings which exist in us, *in order to have a basis for sign-inferences about what is still awaited and about the non-evident*.<sup>11</sup>

It is characteristic of passages like this one that Epicurus speaks of the evidence coming from all the available sources of evident truths. Here we also find the “applications of the mind” that the later Epicureans counted among the criteria (DL 10.31). We do not have a definition of the phrase, but the contexts in which it appears suggest that what is meant is an attempt of the mind or the senses to arrive at accurate information—in other words, careful observation as opposed to casual looking or listening that might lead to errors. So Epicurus explains at *Ep. Hdt.* 51 that “error would not exist if we did not have in ourselves another movement connected with the application to an impression, but distinct from it.” Since the evidence obtained by an application of the mind still comes through the senses, Epicurus himself probably did not treat it as an additional criterion.

The ways of testing the truth or falsity of opinions are briefly described in the next sentence of *Ep. Hdt.*: “by this movement, falsehood arises if it is not attested or contested, but when it is attested or not contested, the truth.” A more detailed exposition appears in Sextus Empiricus:

Of opinions, then, according to Epicurus, some are true, some false. True are those attested and those uncontested by what is evident. *Attestation* is perception through an evident impression of the fact that the object of opinion is such as it was believed to be. For example, if Plato is approaching from far off, I form the conjectural opinion, owing to the distance, that he is Plato. But when he has come close, there is further testimony that he is Plato, now that the gap is reduced, and it is attested by the evident itself.

*Non-contestation* is for the non-evident thing posited and believed to follow from the evident appearance. For example, Epicurus, in saying that there is void, which is non-evident, confirms this through the evident fact of motion. For if void does not exist, there ought not to be motion either, since the moving body would lack a place to pass into as a

result of everything's being full and solid. Therefore the non-evident thing believed is uncontested by the evident appearance, since there is motion.

*Contestation*, on the other hand, is something which conflicts with non-contestation. For it is the elimination of the evident appearance by the positing of the non-evident thing. For example, the Stoics say that void does not exist, judging something non-evident; but once this is posited about it, the evident appearance, namely motion, ought to be co-eliminated with it. For if void does not exist, necessarily motion does not occur either, according to the method already demonstrated.

Likewise, too, *non-attestation* is opposed to attestation, being confrontation through what is evident of the fact that the object of opinion is not such as it was believed to be. For example, if someone is approaching from far off, we conjecture, owing to the distance, that he is Plato. But when the gap is reduced, we recognize through that which is evident that it is not Plato. That is what non-attestation is like: the thing believed was not attested by the evident appearance.

Hence attestation and non-contestation are the criterion of something's being true, while non-attestation and contestation are the criterion of its being false. And that which is evident is the foundation and basis of everything

(S.E. M. 7.211–16).<sup>12</sup>

Sextus is clearly not quoting from Epicurus directly, and his report is influenced by later discussions,<sup>13</sup> but it offers at least some examples to illustrate the method. For purposes of discussion, it is easier to organize the text by types of opinion rather than by truth or falsehood.

Judgments or opinions about observable objects can be accepted as true if they are “attested” by perception, false if they are “not attested.” This sounds odd, for why should a belief for which one does not have confirmatory evidence count as false? After all, there will inevitably be many things or events that cannot be revisited to obtain additional evidence—for instance, the end of a horse race, or a bird flying past. But Sextus's example shows what appears to be intended: opinions about observable objects must be rejected as false if subsequent perception shows that things are not as they were believed to be. Epicurus's method serves to verify or falsify perceptual judgments, and so beliefs about things or events that cannot be so verified fall outside the scope of the method. This is understandable, since the inquirer into nature is not primarily interested in particular facts or events, but in types of things or events that occur regularly and can be perceived by many observers, such as the waxing and waning of the moon, or indeed the appearance of oars in and out of water. These are what Epicurus calls the phenomena or “common perceptions” (*Ep. Hdt.* 82)—observable facts that are confirmed by everybody's repeated experience. It is these that form the evidential basis for his theory: for

example, the indisputable fact that there are bodies, “attested by the senses everywhere” (*Ep. Hdt.* 39), and the equally public fact that there is movement are the phenomena to which Epicurus appeals for the fundamentals of atomism, atoms and void.

For hypotheses about unobservable objects—things that are either too small to be perceived, like atoms, or too distant to be carefully observed, such as the stars or the phenomena of meteorology—direct confirmation or disconfirmation is impossible, and so they must be tested through their relation to observable facts, that is, contestation or non-contestation by the phenomena. An opinion about the unobservable is false if it has an observable consequence that conflicts with an observable phenomenon. The standard example here, also used by Sextus, is Epicurus’s argument for the existence of void (*Ep. Hdt.* 40):

If there were not what we call void or place or the untouchable, the bodies would not have anything through which to move, as they are plainly seen to move.

The movement of bodies, therefore, is a sign of the existence of void.

A hypothesis can be accepted as true if it is not contested by the phenomena. As in the case of false beliefs about perceptible objects, this condition might seem too generous: lots of hypotheses, for example, about events in the distant past are consistent with the phenomena, but that is no reason to accept them all as true. However, once again, the scope of the method is narrower than the general term “opinion” suggests. The method is intended to test hypotheses about the unobservable causes of phenomena, and as Epicurus’s practice in the letters shows, those will count as conflicting with the phenomena if they either fail to explain what they are supposed to explain or, in the case of celestial events and objects, if they are inconsistent with the ways in which similar events or things that can be closely observed are produced. The evidence gained through the senses thus shows us what kinds of hypotheses are possible, and in this sense the phenomena form the basis of sign inferences for what we cannot directly observe. In some cases, such as the existence of void, Epicurus maintains that there is only one possible explanation, and hence only one way of agreeing with the phenomena. In the case of celestial motions or meteorological phenomena such as thunder or lightning, however, the phenomena around us indicate that there are several ways in which events



like lunar eclipses, the waxing and waning of the moon, or the noise in the clouds that we hear as thunder can come about, since similar effects can be produced in more than one way. In such cases, each of the several hypotheses consistent with the phenomena represents at least a possible explanation. Since we cannot verify or falsify the hypotheses by direct observation, scientific method, according to Epicurus, requires that we list them all and accept them as possible—or perhaps even as true, if not in our world then in others.

Lucretius illustrates this with an example (*DRN* 6.703–11):

There are some phenomena for which it is not sufficient to state one cause: you must mention several causes, though only one of these will be the true cause. Let me illustrate this point. If you saw a lifeless human body lying at some distance, you would naturally enumerate all the possible causes of death, to ensure that you mentioned the one true cause. For you could not be certain that the victim had perished by the sword, or by cold, or by disease, or maybe by poison. But we do know that it is something of this kind that has occasioned the death. And the same applies to numerous phenomena.

By listing all the possible causes of death, we can be sure to have captured the actual cause, though we cannot determine which one it was. In the case of meteorological or celestial phenomena, Epicurus often admits that the list of possible causes might be longer, but he insists that it is unscientific to name only one cause, because the observable phenomena call for several possible ones. Astronomers who try to settle on a particular cause are wasting their time—and they also open the door to the possibility of divine intervention, which makes them lapse into mythology (*Ep. Pyth.* 113). The gods, of course, are excluded by Epicurus’s theological doctrine—but also, I think, because Epicurus assumed that there must be an observable model or analogue for any acceptable explanation, and divine intervention has never been observed. This is not a trivial claim, since it sets further limits on possible theories, as can be seen in Epicurus’s polemic against other theories that do not involve supernatural agents. For example, here is Epicurus’s argument against the claim that the soul is incorporeal (*Ep. Hdt.* 67):

There is the further point to be considered, that according to the most common usage we apply the term “incorporeal” to that which can be conceived as existing by itself. But it is impossible to conceive anything that is incorporeal except the void; and the void cannot act or be acted upon, but merely allows bodies to move through it. Hence those who call the

soul incorporeal are silly, for if it were so, it could neither act nor be acted upon. But as it is, both these properties evidently belong to the soul.

Aristotle, for one, certainly thought that his theory of the soul agreed with the observable phenomena—this was after all a requirement of his own philosophical method. But for Epicurus, the only conceivable incorporeal entity was the void. Anything that could affect or move a body had to be a body itself, and so he concluded that the soul must be a body consisting of extremely fine particles that made it too fine to be directly perceived. Here it is the metaphysics of atomism, not the phenomena, that rules out an alternative theory. Epicurus was confident that the concepts we acquire through perceptual experience and observation of the world around us must in principle be sufficient for understanding everything that goes on in the universe: what is inconceivable cannot exist.

## ..... **EPISTEMOLOGY AND ETHICS** .....

What we have considered so far is a general outline of epistemology and a method for natural science that is narrower in scope. Those of Epicurus's arguments for atomism that involve only a single way of agreement with the phenomena could well be regarded as proofs, although Epicurus seems to avoid the term for his own arguments. But they were treated as proofs in later discussions of inferences from signs between Epicureans and Stoics.<sup>14</sup> They are not demonstrations in the Aristotelian sense, where the premises of a proof not only imply, but also explain, the conclusion. Epicurus's arguments are what now would be called inferences to the best explanation—a label that may be misleading, because those inferences are not logically valid. This does not mean that the arguments are bad or faulty. The claim that there must be empty space if there is to be motion may well be true or at least well supported by the evidence, but it does not follow from the existence of motion that there must be empty space.

But sign inferences are not the only kind of argument used in philosophy or elsewhere, and Epicurus's general account of the relations between reason and perception need not be taken to be merely a preface to the methodology of atomist physics. Inferences from signs occur in arguments from perceptual evidence and so belong to, e.g., the natural sciences or to

trial cases. But what, for instance, about arguments in ethics? Here we have very little information in the remaining fragments of Epicurus's work, and it seems likely that there was no explicit discussion of the subject in the *Canon*. The only apparently technical term that seems to refer to some kind of philosophical reasoning is *epilogismos* (ἐπιλογισμός), a word that tends to be translated differently in different contexts. In a study of its use, Schofield<sup>15</sup> has suggested "appraisal or assessment" as a general translation, and this seems plausible, since it does not imply any particular method. Epicurus speaks of *epilogismos* once in a side remark about the study of time in the letter to Herodotus (72–73). The argument seems to be that we do not have a preconception of time as an independently existing object, and that we should therefore consider the observable events in relation to which we speak of much or little time. We would then realize that we think of time as a property of days and nights and their parts, periods of motion and rest, and so on. This insight, he says, does not require proof, but *epilogismos*, by which he means perhaps a reflection on what we think of when we use phrases like "a long time." One might call the reasoning involved consideration, reflection, or assessment, but one would hardly call it a method.

A more revealing passage is, I think, in the letter to Menoeceus (133). This passage is close to the end of the letter, after an exposition of the best life according to Epicurean hedonism that concludes with a praise of practical wisdom (φρόνησις). Then comes the triumphant rhetorical finale (*Ep. Men.* 133):

For who, do you think, is superior to the man who holds only pious beliefs about the gods, who is forever free from the fear of death, and who has found out by reasoning (ἐπιλογισμένον) the end established by nature? He discerns that the highest limit of goods is easy to fulfill and easy to acquire, that bad things have their limit in being either short in duration or easy to bear . . .

It seems clear that this person has not just thought about the goal of life, but arrived at the correct (Epicurean) conception, and he has reached this insight by *epilogismos*. I would suggest that the reasoning is sketched out in the preceding pages—a summary of what was no doubt set out in more detail in Epicurus's lost treatise about the goal of life (*Περὶ τέλους*, mentioned at DL 10.28). It leads from the basic premise that goodness and badness consist in pleasure and pain via a consideration of necessary and

natural, natural, and unnatural desires respectively to the conclusion that once all the natural and necessary desires are fulfilled, all pain and distress are gone and one has reached a state where no good is lacking—that is, happiness. This philosophical argument is one that owes something to Plato (regarding the desires) and to Aristotle (regarding happiness as the state where no good is lacking). One could also describe it as an assessment of the facts of psychology and biology, though I suspect that *epilogismos* was simply the term Epicurus used for any kind of philosophical reasoning that is not a form of deduction or inference from signs. But one should note that the argument’s first and most important claim—that the good is pleasure—comes from Epicurean epistemology: pleasure is the first thing we naturally recognize as good by perception, and our notions of good and bad are derived from the feelings of pleasure and pain. It is for this reason that they must serve as our guides in choice and avoidance. The criterion of the feelings thus guarantees that hedonism in some version must be true; but we still need reason to understand the nature of pleasure and desire, and what this means for the happy life.

As in natural philosophy so in ethics: the basic facts and concepts derive from the senses, but philosophical argument and reflection must be used to arrive at the true conception of happiness.

Epicurus has often been described as an empiricist—no doubt by contrast to Plato, for whom the Forms were the true objects of scientific understanding. This is plausible to the extent that Epicurus, like Democritus, clearly saw in sense perception the necessary foundation for scientific knowledge of the world. But the labels “empiricism” and “rationalism” did not yet exist in Epicurus’s time.<sup>16</sup> In fact, they first appeared in the methodological debates of the Hellenistic doctors—and neither Democritus nor Epicurus seem to have thought that all knowledge must in the end go back to sense perception. Humans have two faculties for attaining knowledge, and Epicurus, reasonably enough, followed Democritus in arguing that they needed to use both.

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<sup>1</sup> Democritus fr. B125; trans. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*.

<sup>2</sup> For the notion of a criterion in Hellenistic philosophy, see Striker, “*κριτήριο τῆς ἀληθείας*” and “The Problem of the Criterion,” both repr. in Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*.

<sup>3</sup> A note on translation: I follow most recent Epicurus scholars in translating the word *αἴσθησις* by “sensation” where it is not used to refer to one of the sense faculties. I use “impression” or “sense impressions” to render *φαντασία* and adjectives derived from it, as in the phrase *φανταστικὴ ἐπιβολὴ τῆς διανοίας* (“application of the mind to an impression”). Note that the interpretation of this phrase is controversial; for different interpretations see, e.g., Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.90; and Asmis, “Epicurean Empiricism,” 94.

<sup>4</sup> Trans. Long and Sedley with modifications.

<sup>5</sup> Trans. Long and Sedley with modifications.

<sup>6</sup> Trans. Long and Sedley.

<sup>7</sup> Trans. Long and Sedley.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Cic. *Fin.* 1.30–31.

<sup>9</sup> Trans. Bury with modifications.

<sup>10</sup> Democr. fr. B11; trans. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*.

<sup>11</sup> DL 10.38, following the passage about preconceptions quoted above; emphasis added.

<sup>12</sup> Trans. Long and Sedley with modifications.

<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the anachronisms in this passage see Sedley, “On Signs.”

<sup>14</sup> For those later discussions about sign inferences, some of them preserved in a papyrus fragment of Philodemus’s treatise *On Signs*, see Sedley, “On Signs”; Barnes, “Epicurean Signs”; and Allen, *Inference from Signs*, study IV.

<sup>15</sup> Schofield, “*Epilogismos*: An Appraisal.”

<sup>16</sup> See Allen, “Experience as a Source”; and Asmis, “Epicurean Empiricism.”

## CHAPTER 3

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# ATOMISM

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DAVID KONSTAN

EPICURUS found in Democritus's atomic theory, when suitably modified, the physical grounds for his vision of psychological tranquility and bodily ease as the goal of life.<sup>1</sup> That it served this purpose (to the extent that it did) was doubtless its chief virtue in Epicurus's mind; he was not concerned, for example, to develop new technologies on the basis of this science, or, so far as we know, to advance theoretical physics for its own sake (cf. *KD* 11, where Epicurus affirms that we would have no need of physical science if we were free of distress).<sup>2</sup> But once he had committed himself to the theory, he was obliged to defend it against attacks from other quarters, above all those derived from Aristotle, and to secure its coherence and explanatory power as a system. How Epicurus's version of atomism worked, and to what extent it was successful as a theory, is the subject of this chapter.

Although a good deal more is known about Epicurean atomism than about Democritus's theory, the evidence is nevertheless sketchy in many respects, and some gaps have to be filled in by conjecture. But conjecture must be consistent with the information we have, and also find some support in the surviving testimonies, however obscure or fragmentary they may be. I believe that Epicurus's atomic theory was more sophisticated and consistent than is sometimes supposed, and my efforts at reconstruction are

guided by this hypothesis. But I shall indicate clearly what is reasonably certain and what is mere surmise, and report the views of other scholars when they conflict with or supplement my own interpretation.

## ATOMS AND VOID

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According to atomism, the fundamental constituents or principles of the world are matter and void.<sup>3</sup> Matter comes in the form of discrete particles of microscopic size; they are bounded by void (when they do not abut one another), which is continuous in the sense that one can draw a line from any point in space to any other without having to cross a stretch of matter (this latter description is not Epicurus's, so far as I know, but it captures the distribution of void as he understood it).<sup>4</sup> Atoms have several elementary properties: these include shape, size, and weight,<sup>5</sup> and, finally, resistance, that is, the impenetrability of one atom or bit of matter by another (resistance is perhaps better described as an attribute of matter as such). Void, on the other hand, is marked by extension and, in contrast to atoms, by non-resistance: material objects such as atoms can pass through it without the least hindrance.<sup>6</sup> Since atoms and void, with their scarce attributes, are the only elementary constituents of things, all perceived qualities are understood to be effects of the shape, size, orientation, and position (relative to other particles) of the atoms, and any changes in these qualities are the result of movements of the atoms in space, and of these only.

The task of accounting for the variety and complexity of phenomena on the basis of so simple a set of functions was daunting, and it challenged the considerable ingenuity of Epicurus and his followers. To some degree the task was made easier, however, insofar as the Epicureans did not seek to confirm their assumptions by direct observation and experiment, which was in practice impossible, but were content to demonstrate that their explanations were not contradicted by observable phenomena (what they dubbed *antimartyrēsis* or “counter-witnessing”) and were more plausible or intuitively self-evident than those of rival physical theories.

Neither atoms nor void are directly visible, and the Epicureans were obliged to deduce their existence from the properties of perceptible things



(for the place of inference from observables in Epicurean epistemology, see [Chapter 2](#)). That some things in the world offer resistance to penetration was clear; so too was the fact that even the hardest of these is subject to fracture and erosion: metal and stone are worn away, and can be burnt, bent, or smashed. Their relative impermeability, accordingly, must be due to the solidity of their component parts, which in turn must be very small, since any perceptible bit of these materials is still frangible. Indeed, the same holds for less tough materials, including air, to the extent that they offer any resistance at all: the difference in hardness is due simply to the relative compactness of their constituent corpuscles. Now, there are other ways to explain, in theory, why things break or are worn down: the elementary material of which they are made, for example, may not be absolutely rigid or unyielding, and so it can be snapped or ground down; differences in resistance may be due, in turn, to the relative density of the prime material, which is assumed, on this theory, to be elastic (something like this may have been the view of Anaximenes). The Epicurean objection to this idea was that, if the elementary material was friable or destructible, then nothing prevented it from being worn down to nothing, and over sufficient time all the matter in the universe would have crumbled out of existence. That it has not done so till now—and the Epicureans assumed that time was infinite in both directions, past and future—is proof that there must be some limit to obliteration, even if it is below the threshold of the senses (cf. Lucr. *DRN* 1.215–24). Of course, one could argue in return that the bits and pieces into which things dissolve can recombine into larger units. The Epicureans doubted, however, that particles scattered throughout the universe and continually subject to further dissolution could unite with the same facility with which they are dissipated, and so conserve the sum total of matter. In this, they would seem to have been guided by a reasonable intuition of entropy. A similar reply could be made to the objection that matter, even if partable, does not disintegrate into nothing, but is infinitely divisible into forever diminishing bits that never reach zero (the view maintained by the Stoics): the tendency to disorder always exceeds that to order, unless one assumes some kind of constructive principle, such as ideal forms (in the manner of Plato and Aristotle), that shapes matter into complex entities. But this was precisely the thesis that the Epicureans radically rejected, in limiting the basic cosmogonic principles to matter and void: void was the only immaterial element that they recognized.<sup>7</sup>

The basic material components of the universe, then, are tiny indivisible particles, or atoms (from the Greek for “unsplittable”). These atoms are located in the void, the evidence for the existence of which is that the atoms can move. If atoms were not in motion, the world would be permanently frozen and unchanging; but the evidence of the senses testifies that this is not the case. Hence, the atoms are subject to displacement, and this is possible only if they are located in a non-resisting medium, which is what void is, by definition. Of course, there are certain kinds of motion that do not require void: the rotation of a sphere is one example. But any perceptible sphere must be composed, as we have seen, of atomic particles, which would have to move in orbits around the center of the sphere. A single atom, if it were spherical, could rotate in place, but the difference between one orientation and another would be indiscernible. For an atom to change place, there must be space for it to move. Now, one could argue that the medium in which atoms move is mushy, and atoms can slide through it, even though it is not empty of matter; but we have already seen the Epicurean objection to the notion of soft matter. Alternatively, one might imagine that the universe is a plenum, that is, full of inelastic matter, but that composite objects can slide past each other, the way a fish passes through water: the fish advances and the water runs round it simultaneously, without leaving any gap (such was Aristotle’s view: *Physics* 214a26–214b11). If we think of atoms as little cubes with slick surfaces, they could conceivably slip by each other this way in rows and files. But somewhere there must be void, according to the Epicureans, for the first atom in line to move; and once the notion of void is granted, there is no need to resort to the counter-intuitive idea of synchronized displacement.

The idea of empty space is familiar enough to us that we may wonder why anyone objected to it in antiquity. Some Greek thinkers (Parmenides and Plato among them) maintained that the existence of a void was a contradiction in terms: matter is what is, and void is what is not; if it is not, it cannot be. The conundrum, so expressed, seems merely verbal, and we may be inclined to dismiss it as a sophism, but it is not entirely silly; indeed, there are physical theories today that hold that space is full.<sup>8</sup> One way to answer the puzzle is to assume that void is not in fact just nothing: after all, it has certain properties, for example non-resistance to matter. It also contributes to the qualities of compound objects: cotton is lighter than lead because it is less dense, that is, has a larger proportion of void per

cubic unit. If space were truly nothing, or a pure absence, it could not act as a cause.<sup>9</sup> It is also possible, as I hinted above, to define matter and void in a purely geometrical fashion: matter is what comes in discrete bounded units (these happen to be very small), and space is what surrounds these units: color the one black, the other white, if you like. Particles of matter do not alter their shape, but the surrounding area does as atoms move through it.<sup>10</sup> It is doubtful, however, that Epicurus would have described his two basic principles in so abstract or reductive a way, and, as we shall see below, there were good reasons for him not to.<sup>11</sup>

## MINIMA

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So far, Epicurus's atomic system, while open to objections, is fairly straightforward. But there is a wrinkle in it that raises more subtle questions. For Epicurus introduced, to all appearances, an innovation in the theory of Democritus in maintaining that atoms, while they are physically unsplitable, are in fact made up of smaller parts, to which he gave the name of *elakhista* or, in Latin, *minima* or "least" bits. Now one motive for giving atoms an internal structure of this sort is obvious: if atoms come in different shapes (and we shall see that they do), then they cannot themselves be of the smallest conceivable size; one cannot cut them up, to be sure, but one can identify parts and extremities and the like, such as the hooks that some atoms have, which allow them to interlock with others and form stable compounds. Very well: but is there a smallest bit, of a size that is theoretically minimal, and which cannot be reduced even in thought? That is, is the finest texture of things somehow granular or quantized, so that an atom must contain such and such a quantity of minimal parts, and no more? The Epicureans held that this was so, and it substantially enriched their theory.

Why should Epicurus have adopted such a view? It is commonly supposed that he did so in response to Zeno's paradoxes, which exposed ostensible contradictions in the assumption of infinite divisibility.<sup>12</sup> Thus, if swift-footed Achilles is to catch a tortoise that has a lead on him, he will have first to reach the place where the tortoise started, by which time the tortoise will have crawled ahead a bit; and so Achilles will have to cover

that distance, by which time ... and so on to infinity. But since it is impossible to make an infinite number of moves in a finite time, Achilles can never catch the tortoise. Modern versions of the paradox are equally puzzling. For instance, if you turn a light switch on at one second, off half a second later, on again after a quarter of a second, and keep going by halves, after two seconds will the switch be on or off? The answer is: either.<sup>13</sup> In any case, Epicurus is assumed to have been inspired by this kind of argument to put a limit to divisibility, and so he arrived at the doctrine of minimal parts of atoms. There is some truth to this account, but it is not the whole story. We shall return in a moment to the question of motion, but at issue here is the structure, as it were, of the atom, and Zeno's riddles need not have led Epicurus to assume that there were smallest bits of matter.

Concerning Democritus's theory, ancient testimonies report two different explanations for why atoms could not be split: that they are too hard, and that they are too small (Simplicius 231a21–29 = Diels-Kranz 67A13). The latter would seem to imply that atoms were of a theoretically minimal size, unless Democritus was making the crudely practical point that they are just too tiny to slice, like cutting poppy seeds with a knife. In any case, not all atoms can have been of minimal dimensions, since Democritus, like Epicurus, held that atoms come in various sizes (one rather dubious report tells us that, according to Democritus, there could be atoms the size of a cosmos).<sup>14</sup> Perhaps Democritus held that some atoms were minima in the theoretical sense, and these were uncuttable because of their smallness rather than their hardness (might they have been soul atoms?).<sup>15</sup> If so, then this is precisely the idea that Epicurus rejected, since he maintained that minima could never be freestanding, but existed only as parts of composite matter. This feature too needs explication, and to understand the reasons for it, we must turn to Aristotle.

Suppose an atom were partless in the theoretical sense, that is, that it could no more be divided than a mathematical point can be. What happens when two such entities are placed side by side? If they are truly point-like, they will have no edges: that is, for something to have an edge, one must be able to distinguish between the edge and what it is the edge of, and so it cannot be theoretically indivisible. This is why two points that are adjacent must simply overlap, as Aristotle observed (*Physics* 6.1, 231a20–231b10): put together as many points as you like, the result will be a single point. Hence, even though there are infinite points in a line, a line cannot be

composed of points, in the sense that one could assemble freestanding points to produce it. Points exist, but only as parts of lines or of two- or three-dimensional items.<sup>16</sup>

Now, whereas a point is a mathematical abstraction, with no mass and hence not a material entity, Epicurus's minima have dimensions, albeit of infinitesimal extension; if you add up enough of them, they will produce a finite length (I will consider in a moment just how many minima it takes to do so, and what the relevant sense of "infinitesimal" is in this connection). Nevertheless, they share with points the absence of any internal differentiation whatsoever, including that needed for there to be an edge. Hence, they too cannot be assembled into larger units by being placed edge to edge, but exist only as parts of an extended substance, that is, of atoms. Atoms, in turn, can have edges, since they are not minima and an edge can be distinguished from the body of the particle. The edge is, presumably, one minimum thick: it is just the outermost layer of minimal parts. That atoms have edges explains why they do not simply fuse when they meet; rather, they touch edge to edge, like macroscopic entities. Just why the edges of two atoms do not themselves fuse remains something of a mystery; I suppose that they are inseparably attached to the atoms of which they form a part, and this degree of structure is sufficient to keep the bits of matter distinct. If Epicurus had simply conceived of atoms and space geometrically, as noted above, it would have been difficult to discriminate between two cubical figures side by side and one single oblong figure; the line dividing the two atoms would be purely theoretical, with no physical significance. With solid matter, we must imagine the line as composed of two distinct minimal edges or surfaces. This is simply a fact of nature: were it not so, atoms would indeed fuse upon collision. One way of escaping this conclusion is to posit that atoms never in fact meet, but that there always remains an infinitesimal space between them; such a view would import other problems, not necessarily insoluble, but there does not seem to be any evidence that Epicurus adopted it, though it may well have occurred to him or to later Epicureans.<sup>17</sup>

Aristotle's discussion of points and lines was part of an attack on the notion of indivisibles, and he took the argument further: if, he maintained, one affirmed that space was not infinitely divisible, but that one necessarily arrived at minima that were not dimensionless but nevertheless could not be further reduced, then one had to accept in addition the idea that motion over

such spatial minima was discontinuous.<sup>18</sup> That is, a moving object would have to cross such a minimum unit in a single bound, since it could not pass through it gradually: to do that, it would have at some moment to be located partway through the minimum, but a minimum has no parts. Since motion, moreover, is a factor of time as well as space, Aristotle further concluded that, for any theory of minima, time too must be quantized, and hence motion takes place in a saltatory fashion, over one quantum of space per quantum of time. In proposing this radical conception of time and space, Aristotle was responding directly to Zeno's paradoxes, which he describes in detail, and so his argument addresses not just the composition of matter and the problem of edgeless points, but the question of continuous motion as well. The remarkable fact is that Epicurus adopted Aristotle's hypothetical thesis wholesale, and affirmed that atoms in fact cannot be said to move over minimal distances, in the sense of advancing in a continuous fashion, but rather can only be said "to have moved"; they are at one instant of time located in one position, and in the next discrete instant at another position, one minimum unit further on (this aspect of the theory seems to have been adopted as orthodox Islamic doctrine several centuries later).<sup>19</sup> Atoms moving in this way, moreover, would all proceed at the same speed. This conclusion was perhaps not forced on Epicurus, since he might have allowed that an atom can rest at one place for two or more temporal instants, and then jump forward; but this would have imported a greater complication, since it would have been necessary to explain why this should be the case in some situations but not others: what would make an atom pause sometimes and not at other times? Indeed, what would prevent an atom from being wholly at rest, staying in the same place forever? Precisely to avoid this potential kind of entropy, Epicurus was wise to predicate the permanent and uniform motion of all atoms, without allowing them ever to slow down: this was the doctrine of "equal speed" (*isotakheia*).<sup>20</sup> Atoms keep on moving because that is how they function in space and time.<sup>21</sup>

A fully quantized description of space, time, and motion had substantial consequences for Epicurean atomism, and led to paradoxes of its own. One of the most interesting is that reported by the sceptical philosopher, Sextus Empiricus (*M.* 10.144–47), as a way of confuting Epicurus. Sextus (or his source) proposed the following thought experiment. Imagine that two atoms



are nine minimum units apart; add that they are approaching each other in a direct line, and doing so, as per the doctrine of uniform velocity, at one minimum of space per minimum of time. After one instant, they will be seven minima apart; after two, five; after three, three, and after four instants, just one minimum unit will separate them. What now? They cannot meet halfway in the remaining minimum of space, because there is no halfway point in a minimum. Nor can one atom cross the minimum in a leap, while the other remains stationary, since this would violate the principle of uniform speed. Hence, the atoms can never meet. But then what? Do they rebound? But they have not collided. Do they just sit there? But that cannot be either. That is Sextus's puzzle.

I believe that this dilemma must have rested on genuine Epicurean suppositions, for if it did not, it would have convinced no one; after all, Epicureanism was a live doctrine at the time the puzzle was propounded, and if Epicureans did not in fact maintain, for example, that atoms move at a uniform speed, they would have said so and that would be that. I also believe that the Epicureans must have had some answer to the paradox, or at least that they did not simply let it stand and concede that their doctrine was incoherent. I argue that the answer involved a sophisticated conception of the nature of minima, and one that was capable, among other things, of responding to objections to the theory that were raised on purely mathematical grounds, such as the problem of incommensurables: that is, what to make of the incommensurability between the side and the diagonal of a square or cube, if all dimensions are finite multiples of the minimum unit. The solution to these difficulties must lie in the nature of the minimum itself: it has to have been a strange entity, quite different from anything encountered in the perceptible world, and imagining it as a small cube or figure of any other shape is inevitably to have a distorted image of it. That is, a minimum is not just a minuscule version of ordinary matter; although it has extension, its properties are in other respects as distinct from strictly finite entities as a point is from a solid mass.<sup>22</sup>

## **“THE NOT STRICTLY INFINITE”**

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The clue to Epicurus's conception of the minimum resides, I believe, in the distinction he draws between three orders of magnitude on the macroscopic scale: the finite, the infinite, and a third, intermediate magnitude which he calls "not strictly (or simply: *haplōs*) infinite," also described as "inconceivably" large (*oukh haplōs apeiroi alla monon aperilēptoi*).<sup>23</sup> This last quantity is applied to a small number of features in the universe, including the number of shapes in which atoms come and certain vast distances mentioned in the discussion of the speed at which atoms travel.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, the extent of space and time is infinite, according to Epicurus (we shall discuss the reasons why below), as is the number of atoms, and indeed the number of atoms of any given shape, though the variety of shapes is not. Now, one may imagine that by "inconceivable" or "ungraspable" (*aperilēpton*) Epicurus meant to signify nothing more than an extremely large number, of a magnitude that one cannot in practice count (e.g., the grains of sand on a beach), but which is nevertheless finite in principle, like any ordinary quantity. But Epicurus does not subsume other, actually incalculable quantities under the category of the "not strictly infinite," and extending it to embrace any huge number threatens to trivialize the idea. Modern mathematics has distinguished between denumerable and non-denumerable infinities (the set of integers is an example of the former, the set of real numbers an example of the latter), but these classes are of no help in approaching Epicurus's conception, since he is clear that, though inconceivably large, the quantity in question is not infinite (or not strictly so). As it happens, such finite but theoretically (and not just practically) incalculable quantities have been identified, or constructed, by modern mathematicians; an example is the value called omega: "omega is perfectly well defined and it is a specific number, but it is impossible to compute in its entirety."<sup>25</sup> I do not for a moment imagine that Epicurus had defined such a quantity in a rigorous way (though I would not put it beyond the ability of Archimedes to have done so, if he had wished); but his intuition concerning such a possibility should be taken seriously. We may note in passing that the Stoics too seem to have entertained such a quantity, if we can trust Plutarch's account (*De comm. not.* 1079B–C): "When we are asked," says Chrysippus, "whether we contain any parts and how many and of what parts *they* are composed and how many, we shall employ a distinction, on the one hand positing on a large scale that we are composed of head and torso and limbs, for this was all there was to the

question and the paradox; but if they extend this questioning to ultimate parts,' he says, 'we must not answer any such thing, but rather we must say neither out of what things we consist nor, similarly, out of how many, whether of an infinite or a finite number.'" Plutarch treats this response as an evasion: "For if, just as there is the indifferent between good and bad, there is some middle term between finite and infinite, he should have resolved the puzzle by saying what this is" (*De comm. not.* 1079B–C). Epicurus, at all events, was explicit on the matter.

The primary example of an incomprehensible quantity in Epicureanism is, as we have seen, the variety of shapes of atoms, and between them Epicurus and Lucretius indicate the reason why. On the one hand, a strictly finite variety could not generate the extraordinary complexity and diversity of perceptible things; on the other hand, an infinite variety of atomic shapes would lead to two unacceptable results. First, Epicurus reasons, it would allow for the existence of every imaginable entity, since there would be no limit to possible atomic combinations; but in fact, despite the great diversity of phenomena, the number of natural kinds is far from infinite (species do not occur in continuous gradations, for example, but are discrete), and some are self-evidently excluded, for instance monstrous hybrids such as centaurs or other mythological creatures.<sup>26</sup> Second, if atoms came in infinite varieties, then some would have to reach visible proportions, but this is seen not to be the case, "nor is it possible to think (*epinoēsai*) how an atom might become visible" (*Ep. Hdt.* 56).

Lucretius fills in the explanation of why an infinite number of atomic kinds must result in atoms of indefinitely great size: it has to do with the minuscule but nevertheless non-zero magnitude of the minimum parts. For any given number of minima, there is only a finite number of ways to arrange them. As Lucretius puts it: "take particles made of two or three minima, or increase them by a few more" (2.485–86), and locate the parts top and bottom, left and right, in any way you please; at a certain point, you will not be able to produce any further variations without adding more minima, and eventually you will have to add so many that the atom will become immense. Now, one might understand Lucretius to be suggesting that, although individual minima cannot be freestanding, an atom may consist of as few as two, or a little more. This, I think, would be to mistake a thought experiment, simplified for the sake of clarity, for a rigorous statement about the composition of atoms in Epicurean theory. After all,

atoms come in an incomprehensibly large variety of shapes, and still do not reach a visible size: the number of minima that make up some of these types, at least, must be of a comparable order of magnitude. If so, then a number of minima that is not strictly infinite is not sufficient to produce a magnitude of perceptible proportions; and this leads us to infer, in turn, that the dimensions of the minimum may be related to the order of magnitude called “incomprehensible” precisely as its inverse. To put it differently, if minima were of some finite size, then multiplying them by an incomprehensibly large figure would generate an immense and presumably visible atom; thus, they must be small enough for this not to be the case. The minimum, then, while not zero, is infinitesimal in the sense just specified. This is, I believe, a reasonably safe deduction. Less certain, but highly plausible in my view, is the proposition that even the smallest atom contains an incomprehensibly large number of minima. Minima are such that to accumulate to any measurable extension, they must be multiplied, if not infinitely—for this would result in an infinite length—at all events by more than any finite quantity one can name.

The above argument, though to a degree speculative, provides an account of minima that goes part way to answering the ingenious puzzle propounded by Sextus Empiricus. For one could claim that his hypothetical diagram of two approaching atoms presupposes a mental image of minima as ordinary intervals, with the intervening space imagined as measurable by finite multiples of them, a little like Lucretius’s picture of atoms consisting of two or three minima. But suppose that minima, despite the fact that incomprehensibly large amounts of them add up to perceptible spans, do not obey all the laws that govern finite numbers. For example, if any imaginable set of minima is already almost, if not strictly, infinite, it may not be possible to determine whether their number is odd or even, any more than it is in the case of infinite sets (compare the conundrum of the light switch, above). That even and odd might be indiscernible in the case of very large numbers was a commonplace of Stoic epistemology, recorded in many sources, and it was also ascribed, though less frequently, to Epicureanism. Put more technically, in the case of certain numerically large groups of things, such as the stars, it is not that we do not know, or yet know, whether the predicate *F* or not-*F* applies to them, but rather it is true that neither *F* nor not-*F* applies. In particular, although oddness or evenness is predicable of ordinary quantities, neither can be predicated of such indeterminately

large groups as stars (Sextus Empiricus *P.* 2.97; *M.* 8.147, 318) or (another common example) the hairs on one's head.<sup>27</sup> If this is so, then we may perhaps say that, from an Epicurean viewpoint, Sextus's challenge fails because it is badly formulated. One may still object, of course, that at some moment the atoms must be just one minimum apart, whatever the case with imagined intervals. But if a minimum is indeed of infinitesimal size, then separation by a single minimum is like being separated by the width of an edge, and this may be as good as contact.

## INFINITY

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Putting aside the tantalizing problems associated with infinitesimal minima, which may never be satisfactorily resolved, we may consider now the reasons why the Epicureans held that the universe was infinite in extent, and some of the difficulties that this supposition entailed. In principle, their answer was easy. Imagine that the universe has a limit: stand at the limit, and stick out your arm (or cast a spear); if it meets resistance, then there is something massive beyond the limit; if it does not, then there is space. Either way, the universe extends beyond the limit, and this thought experiment works for any limit you set; hence, the universe extends infinitely. This is not an absurd argument, but it depends on certain intuitions about the nature of space that were not shared by all ancient thinkers, and in particular not by Aristotle.<sup>28</sup> Epicurus conceived of space geometrically, and Aristotle agreed that, in mathematics, a line can be extended indefinitely. But in the real world, Aristotle held, paradoxes result from the hypothesis of infinite extension, since distances have real effects, for example on the force of attraction: since heavy objects like stones require, on Aristotle's view, ever-greater force to lift them away from the place to which they tend by nature, namely the center of the world, any object an infinite distance from the center would have infinite weight, and require infinite force to keep it there. Since this is inconceivable, the real world is bounded; outside it, there is nothing—that is, not empty space, but literally nothing.

The Epicureans were not impressed by the argument from weight, since they introduced another explanation for why things rise and fall,

independent of natural places (we shall turn to this in a moment). From the belief that space was infinitely extended, it followed that the number of atoms must also be infinite. A finite number of atoms in infinite space would be scattered so widely that they could never combine to create a world such as the one we live in, or other such worlds which must, of necessity, have come and continue to come into being elsewhere, in infinite numbers. Given that the variety in kinds of atoms is only inconceivably large, moreover, an infinite number of atoms also entails that there must be an infinite quantity of each kind of atom. All these atoms move unimpeded in space, at the uniform (and very great) velocity of one minimum of space per minimum of time, unless and until they collide with another atom. When this occurs, they rebound and so move off in a different direction, though always at the same speed. Should they become entangled in a cluster of atoms, they will bounce back and forth among themselves, never losing their individual velocity, although the cluster itself may move slowly or not at all, if the internal vibrations of its atoms cancel each other out. When enough atoms congregate in the appropriate way, they may form the integument of a local world, inside of which atoms will become enmeshed in various combinations and generate the multifarious entities, from air and water up to living species and human beings, that their elementary shapes make possible. Given that atomic shapes are not infinite, as we have seen, only certain compounds will prove to be stable, with the result that other worlds, though they may differ substantially from our own, will nevertheless exhibit more or less the same features, and in particular are not likely to be home to creatures that are unsustainable in our world.<sup>29</sup>

## WEIGHT

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Atoms are always on the move; but in what direction? Epicurus introduced into Democritus's theory the atomic attribute of weight, which he understood as the cause of downward motion, and it is natural to assume that, barring interference, atoms tend to fall.<sup>30</sup> If all atoms fall vertically at a uniform rate, however, they will never meet, and universes will never form.

The Epicureans had an answer to this puzzle, in the form of the so-called atomic swerve, to which we shall come shortly. More abstractly, we may

ask what the difference is, in an infinite universe, between atoms moving in the same direction at an identical speed, and those same atoms standing perfectly still. If there is nothing outside the universe, relative to which they are in motion, and there is no internal variation in their movement, it makes no difference whether they are moving quickly, slowly, or not at all.<sup>31</sup> I believe that the Epicureans were aware of this, despite the sometimes misleading language they employ to make their point. But let us suppose a world in which atoms are busy colliding with each other, most often confined in compounds and with a vibratory motion. These atoms are no longer all moving in the same direction, but every which way. So some are not “falling,” or at least not at the same speed as others. Are they actually moving upwards or sideways? And, if so, what does it matter that they have weight?

I believe that the property of weight, whether or not it was invoked to account for atomic inertia, that is, the necessity that atoms be always in motion (in whatever direction), was intended principally to explain the fact of gravity in the observable world. The reasoning was not simplistic, of the sort that atoms fall, hence so do we. To see how the Epicureans argued, let us begin by considering an object, such as a ball, that has been tossed up in the air. It will be seen to slow down as it rises, come momentarily to a stop, and then begin to descend, ever more rapidly, until it hits the ground. What has happened on the atomic level? At the initial toss, atoms at the lower surface of the ball collide with those in the rising hand of the thrower (we may leave aside the mechanism by which the hand was lifted); those atoms will rebound in some direction other than down, and bang in turn against atoms deeper in the ball’s core, until all the atoms in the ball (which are of course vibrating all the while) are moving upward (relative to the earth) at some average velocity. Now, the average velocity is what we would today call a vector: that is, it is the resultant speed and direction when all the individual motions have been factored and those that cancel each other out are removed from the equation. Thus, inside the ball, there are atoms moving left and right, forward and backward, as well as up and down, and all at an enormous speed; but because they are moving left and right, etc., in equal degree, the sum total of lateral motion is zero. The atoms have an overall average motion upward, however, because the hand that threw the ball blocked some of the downward-moving atoms and caused them to alter their direction, and this effect was transmitted in turn to all the other atoms

in the ball. Thus, the ball as a whole has an upward vector, though much shorter (if we take the length of the vector to measure velocity) than the vector of any given atom inside. Well and good: but why does the ball begin to slow down? The answer, I presume, is that the atoms at the ball's upper surface are colliding with those in the surrounding air, which has the same effect, in reverse direction, as the toss of the hand. This will explain the decrease in velocity, until the ball reaches its apogee; but what then causes it to drop again? After all, the ball is in mid-air, with air atoms cushioning it below as well as covering it from above. One answer might be that, on average, the air atoms have a downward vector (comparable to the upward vector of the thrower's hand), and so exert a downward pressure on the ball: those below the ball too are in some sense falling. But why should this be the case? The answer I propose is that when atoms collide, whether in the ball or any other medium, they do not simply rebound in an equal but opposite sense; rather, they have a slight tendency, at least sometimes, to favor one particular direction, with the result that, if a compound body is left undisturbed even in empty space, it will have a vector, however small, resulting from the internal impacts of its constituent particles. This vector is an elementary fact of nature; it may be considered an attribute of atoms themselves, and given the name of weight. Barring outer interference, the vector will always point in the same direction, and that direction is, by definition, down. And that is all there is to atomic weight.<sup>32</sup>

The above analysis assumes that the downward motion of atoms results from collisions, and does not in some fashion assert itself in the course of a single atom's trajectory. There is some textual evidence in support of this interpretation. One of these is in Epicurus's *Letter to Herodotus* (61), where he writes: "an atom will move as quickly as thought until there is a counterblow, either from something outside, or else from its own weight acting against the force of the object which hit it." Although the last clause wants much in clarity, it looks as though weight is somehow related to collision. In the doxography ascribed to Plutarch, *On the Opinions of the Philosophers*, we read that Epicurus added weight to the atomic properties recognized by Democritus: "for he said it is necessary that bodies move by means of the blow of the weight, since they will not be moved [sc. by some other force or agency]."<sup>33</sup>

An advantage of the vector theory of atomic weight described above is that it provides an answer to a criticism of Epicurus's theory that was



common in antiquity, and repeated even in modern times, namely what sense the concept of “down” might have in an infinite and globally homogeneous universe. Are not all directions alike? In Aristotle’s spherical world, heavy elements were attracted to the center, light ones to the periphery; but how could there be a privileged orientation in Epicurus’s system?<sup>34</sup> Epicurus could respond that down simply is the innate tendency in atoms to emerge from collisions, on average, in a favored direction; this is a fact of nature, like the fundamental constants in modern physics. Still closer to Epicurus’s view, as I have reconstructed it, is the modern argument against left-right parity in the universe. We are accustomed to thinking of right and left as merely arbitrary spatial orientations: if I turn round 180 degrees, then left is where right had been, and vice versa. But it was demonstrated some decades ago that, when certain atoms decompose, the emission of particles to one side and the other is not uniform; one can, accordingly, determine which direction is “left” and which is “right” anywhere in the universe, by performing this experiment (in the sense that they will match the original designation of these terms).<sup>35</sup> In principle, the Epicurean account of “down” (as I understand it) works in exactly the same way.

As an explanation of gravity, the above account is still deficient in one respect: for if all bodies exhibit, as a result of internal collisions, a tendency to fall, why is this not true of the earth as a whole, with the result that the ball would remain suspended at its apogee, and we would all float lightly over the ground? Again, the Epicureans anticipated this objection: for they argued that the earth was shaped like a flat disk, and that it was located at or near the center of the cosmos, so that it was surrounded on all sides by the thinner medium of air.<sup>36</sup> As a relatively dense object, the earth will drop through the circumambient air by virtue of *ekthlipsis*, that is, the extrusion of lighter things by heavier ones.<sup>37</sup> This is the reason why bubbles of air, for example, rise through water. Extrusion is a function of mass rather than of weight in the technical Epicurean sense: denser objects moving in any direction will drive out rarer ones. The reason, I imagine, is that denser objects contain more atoms in proportion to the space they occupy, and these overcome the smaller number of atoms as they beat against each other. But objects with a broad surface will move more slowly through any medium than those that are thin and streamlined, since the latter will

encounter less resistance. The earth, as a saucer-like disk or Frisbee, will sink less rapidly through the air than narrower or more tapered items; as a result, these latter will adhere to its upper surface, the way a pin might sit on a leaf floating gently to the ground. Correspondingly, anything of this shape beneath the earth would fall into the air below.<sup>38</sup>

A result of this account is that gravity will be oriented in the same direction—down—in every local world, and not just ours. Indeed, the Epicureans made sport of the Aristotelian view that heavy objects tend to the center of the world by observing that, on this theory, “down” must suddenly change directions when one passes through the midpoint of the earth (*Ep. Hdt.* 60).<sup>39</sup>

## THE SWERVE

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We have almost completed the account of atomic motion, but there remains to be discussed one feature that was the particular object of scorn on the part of non-Epicureans: this is the so-called swerve, that is, an atom’s departure from linear motion (presumably in any direction) at random times by a minimum amount. No motive or cause was adduced to account for this motion, which has no counterpart in Democritus’s theory: it is simply a property of atoms, like weight, that manifests itself independently of collisions, and at no fixed or predictable moment. The swerve was put to use in at least two ways. First, it was invoked to account for the manifest fact of voluntary action, in the sense that human beings and animals can initiate their own acts, without these being the consequence of purely external causation. How this might work in practice is highly controversial, and is not within the purview of this chapter (see [Chapter 9](#)).

Second, the swerve explained, as indicated above, how free-falling atoms moving at a uniform speed would begin to collide with each other. Since the Epicurean universe is eternal, with no beginning or end to time (see *Ep. Hdt.* 44), there was no need to posit an originary moment, when atoms had not yet gathered to form local worlds, and the Epicureans could simply have affirmed that atoms had always interacted with each other. If, however, the downward motion of atoms works in the way I have suggested, then there would conceivably be the danger that atoms would

line up more and more, sloping a bit more after each collision; the swerve may then be seen as a counterweight to this tendency.

Although modern quantum theory has accustomed us to the idea of indeterminacy at the atomic level, Epicurus's assumption of a random motion in atoms may still seem bizarre in terms of ancient physical concepts. To justify it, I can do no more than remark that atoms swerve by just one minimum, in the technical sense. It is debated whether this means that the atoms simply shifted lanes, as it were, and continued to move linearly, one minimum over, or changed direction by a minimum degree. Without taking a position on this question, for which the evidence seems to me to be too scanty, we can surmise that here again, as in the answer to the puzzle posed by Sextus Empiricus, the minimum appears to have its own geometry, as it were: the laws of nature do not operate at the infinitesimal level in the way they do over finite intervals. The swerve may thus function as another indication of the peculiar point-like character of the minimum, despite its extension. A move of one minimum is, practically speaking, no move at all.

## PRIMARY AND SECONDARY QUALITIES

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Individual atoms have no characteristics apart from size, shape, weight (in the sense specified), and resistance; every other perceptible quality, such as color, odor, sound, hardness, roughness, and so forth, pertains to the supra-atomic level (this is true of weight or heaviness in the ordinary sense as well). These qualities are not a direct function of analogous properties in the atoms, but rather of the atomic combinations that constitute perceptible objects. These objects emit streams of particles that impinge upon the senses (and in certain cases directly on the mind), and give rise to perception. Insofar as perceptions are simply the interaction between the very fine particles that emanate from objects and the particular structure of sense organs, they are always veridical (cf. [Chapter 2](#)). Of course, it is true that under certain conditions things may appear differently to me than they do to others, or than they do to me at another time (e.g., if my taste buds are jaded, or if I have poor hearing, or again if the lighting changes); but what I sense is just as I sense it, and if I mistakenly conclude that the food I am

eating really lacks taste, rather than that I cannot taste it, the fault lies with the inference, not the sense data themselves.

The reason the Epicureans offer for the absence of secondary qualities in atoms is that such qualities are subject to change, whereas the atoms themselves are inalterable. If the redness of a rose were due to the red color of the atoms out of which it is made, when the rose withers we would have to suppose that its atomic constituents also lose their bright hue. But to be subject to change is to lack durability, and so reintroduces the danger that the building blocks of nature might crumble into nothing. On the surface, this is not a very good argument. One could imagine, for example, that the oxidation of the rose petals was due to the absorption of atoms in the air that naturally have a more faded hue, and hence avoid the conclusion that the rose's original atoms changed color (this is something like the view of Anaxagoras). One could also posit that atoms have colors, but that these are not directly responsible for the hues of macroscopic objects; the latter arise as a result of combinations of atoms, just as they do on the Epicurean hypothesis. Hence, there would be no need for atoms to alter color or other properties just because the objects they compose do so. This latter view, however, seems otiose: atomic colors would be different in kind from perceptible colors, and since they serve no explanatory purpose, their existence cannot be inferred from the phenomena. The former account is harder to dismiss. Even if we assume, with the Epicureans, that objects give off endless series of lamina or simulacra (so fine as not to produce a noticeable loss of substance), and that these are the direct cause of sensation, the atoms of which the simulacra are composed could perfectly well have individually the qualities that are perceived. One would not need to posit atoms of every conceivable hue, taste, or odor; the more subtle of these could be amalgams of primary colors, etc. Still, the theory seems redundant. For we could just as well think of a sharp atom as producing a bitter taste, as Lucretius affirms, without thereby ascribing the quality of bitterness to the atom; and similarly for colors and other perceptibles. Atoms of a certain shape, say, tend to generate the sensation of red, or of a low pitch of sound, when they are suitably combined in compounds that contain other kinds of atoms as well, in sufficient quantities to emit simulacra. The Epicurean view has economy to recommend it.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

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The simplicity of Epicurean atomism was at the same time its flaw; for to explain all phenomena on the basis of the purely mechanical movement of atoms, without even a concept of force (for example, attraction and repulsion) or energy, must tax the cleverest of minds. How are living creatures formed from the smallest seeds? The acorn must contain the appropriate atoms, so arranged as to ensure its development into a mature oak, stage by stage. There was no way to examine the disposition of the atoms directly; by hypothesis they were below the threshold of perception (instruments of magnification were not even contemplated). One could only assume that there were stable atomic patterns that would do the trick, and that they came in discrete types, so that one yielded an oak, another a maple, without generating intermediate or mixed species.

This is how the world appears, and if you accept the Epicurean theory, then atoms in their all-but-infinite variety must be able to cohere in molecular formations that produce it. At least the system makes do without positing immaterial entities that govern the growth of organic things by imaging their endpoint or *telos* (as with Platonic ideas or Aristotelian types), not to mention gods. This was the crucial issue for the Epicureans: if they could demonstrate that the order of the world did not depend either on spiritual entities or on divine intervention, then the way was open to eliminating a conception of the soul as a ghostly thing that can survive the dissolution of the body, and hence be subject to punishment in the afterlife.

Epicurean atomism, with its strictly materialist premises, had its work cut out for it. It had to account not only for the physical world, including cosmogony and biological nature in all its richness, but also for perception and for mental events such as thinking, dreams, will, and imagination. Rather than attempt to provide detailed analyses of every phenomenon, the Epicureans concentrated on a few striking problems, such as the causes of lightning and thunder, and the attraction between magnets and iron. Their arguments were ingenious, and served to engage the reader or disciple in the effort to discover solutions on their own; once you rose to the challenge, you were well on the way to being hooked. For what mattered was not providing all the answers, but instilling the confidence that atomism could provide a plausible explanation, if called upon, for any phenomenon of

nature, one that would rival those advanced by other schools without relying on metaphysical suppositions that could not be empirically verified and had more the character of superstition. Thus, Lucretius often summons Memmius, the dedicatee of his book, to think up an explanation for a given case, now that he has mastered the basic elements of atomic theory (e.g., *DRN* 5.1281–82). To make the attempt is implicitly to have acknowledged that the system does work, and that what remains is filling in the fine points. If any readers of this chapter are moved to improve on my account of Epicurean atomism, and begin to work out better versions of the atomic hypothesis that are consistent with Epicurus’s fundamental principles (that all of nature is reducible to matter and void), they will have taken a step toward accepting the doctrine that human fulfillment lies in this world rather than the next, and the shade of Epicurus—if shades existed—would be pleased.

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<sup>1</sup> I am deeply grateful to Francesco Verde, Jeffrey Fish, and Kirk Sanders for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> For the differences between Epicurean “naturalism” and modern scientific aims and methods, see Milton, “The Limitations of Ancient Atomism,” 178–83; also Manolidis, *Die Rolle der Physiologie*.

<sup>3</sup> Francesco Verde suggests to me that the apparent absence, in Epicureanism, of a general term for “matter” (*hyle*) is itself an indication of the Epicureans’ thoroughgoing materialism. I should point out here that my analytic account of Epicurus’s theory does not reproduce Epicurus’s own order of exposition in his *Letter to Herodotus* (which perhaps follows more or less the arrangement of topics in his *magnum opus*, the *Physics*), nor again the analogous exposition in Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*; for a survey that does follow Epicurus’s exposition, see Sedley, “Hellenistic Physics and Metaphysics,” 362–82.

<sup>4</sup> My geometrical description of void (or *to kenon*, “what is empty,” in Epicurus’s terminology) is not entirely uncontroversial. One might, for example, understand “void” in the sense of “space,” which would include not just the interstices between atoms but also the space that atoms themselves are presumed to occupy. One might infer such a view from Lucr. *DRN* 1.421: “for there exist bodies and void [*inane*], in which bodies are located and where they move in various directions [*haec in quo sita sunt et qua diversa moventur*]” (cf. 1.426–28; *Ep. Hdt.* 40). For this and other conundrums concerning the Epicurean conception of void (e.g., the idea of “place”), see Sedley, “Two Conceptions of Vacuum”; brief account in Sedley, “Hellenistic Physics and Metaphysics,” 367–69; for “space” as the complement of atoms (that is, just where atoms are not), see Inwood, “The Origin of Epicurus’ Concept of Void”; Konstan, “Epicurus on the Void”; cf. also Verde, *Epistola a Erodoto*, 93–98.

<sup>5</sup> Weight is a feature that Epicurus evidently added to Democritus’s account; see below.

<sup>6</sup> Epicurus emphasizes its lack of tactility (*anaphēs physis*, *Ep. Hdt.* 39–40), in contrast to atoms, which can touch and be touched. In a derivative way, the void also has shape, insofar as it is conceived of as the space not occupied by atoms.

<sup>7</sup> The Stoics too allowed for immaterial entities, for example “meanings” (*lekta*) and time.

<sup>8</sup> For a highly speculative statement of the cosmos as plenum, see Van Flandern, *Dark Matter, Missing Planets and New Comets*. A related view is that empty space, understood strictly as “nothing,” nevertheless is permeated by energy and can generate matter. See Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing*, e.g. p. 103 on “allowing for empty space to have energy.”

<sup>9</sup> The Epicureans do not seem to speak of quantity of space relative to number and size of atoms as a factor in density, but this conception of space as an agent has been raised by others.

<sup>10</sup> Betegh, “Epicurus’ Argument for Atomism” argues that Epicurus’s thesis in *Ep. Hdt.* 40–41 is not so much that atoms are hard (and hence uncuttable) as that they are inalterable in shape; hardness, of course, simply guarantees inalterability, but perhaps it is an unnecessary premise.

<sup>11</sup> Among other things, what would happen when atoms touch? This problem is addressed below. Verde, “TRIGŌNA ATOMA” argues that the Epicurean theory was in fact a response to the mathematical conception of Plato and Xenocrates.

<sup>12</sup> See Sedley, “Hellenistic Physics and Metaphysics,” 357 on the idea of minima propounded by Diodorus Cronus (slightly earlier than Epicurus): “there can be little doubt that the paradoxes of divisibility propounded in the fifth century BC by Zeno of Elea are their ultimate inspiration”; cf. also Giannantoni, “Aristotele, Diodoro Crono e il moto degli atomi.”

<sup>13</sup> The paradox is sometimes referred to as Thomson’s Lamp; it was first propounded in Thomson, “Tasks and Super-Tasks.”

<sup>14</sup> Diels-Kranz 68A43, from Aëtius; cf. Verde, *Epistola a Erodoto*, 105–107.

<sup>15</sup> Drozdek, “The Atomists on the Soul” argues that for Democritus soul atoms, and only soul atoms, are self-moving: “The reason is that spherical atoms are always in motion since this is their nature (A104); the source of motion of the soul atoms is their round shape and small size (A10)” (p. 32). Soul atoms were doubtless more mobile than others, but I doubt that Democritus considered them to constitute a distinct class of self-moving particles.

<sup>16</sup> Francesco Verde reminds me that Aristotle employs in this context the term “limit” (*peras*) rather than “part” (*meros*); cf. O’Brien, “Démocrite à l’Académie?”. Verde suggests that this may explain why Epicurus speaks of the minima of the atom as *perata* (*Ep. Hdt.* 59); cf. Verde, *Epistola a Erodoto*, 166–68.

<sup>17</sup> The view finds some support in later commentaries: Luria, “Die Infinitesimaltheorie der antiken Atomisten,” fr. 236–37: e.g., Philoponus on *De generatione et corruptione* 1.8, p. 158: “Democritus did not speak precisely of contact when he said that the atoms are in contact with one another ... but rather what he called contact was the atoms being near one another and not standing very far apart”; but the interpretation of these passages is insecure. Luria, “Die Infinitesimaltheorie der antiken Atomisten,” 154–56, followed by Taylor, concluded that Democritus in fact invoked such a principle, and justified it (according to Taylor) by appealing to a force of repulsion (*The Atomists*, 187: “Hence what appears to be impact [between atoms] is in fact action at an extremely short distance; rather than actually banging into one another, atoms have to be conceived as repelling one another by some sort of force transmitted through the void”); for a critique of the notion of forces in ancient atomism, see Konstan, “Democritus the Physicist.” Bodnár, “Atomic Independence and Indivisibility” appeals to the inalterability or “formal coherence” of atoms as the reason why they do not fuse upon contact, but this ignores what I take to be the crucial role of minima; Bodnár surveys and rejects alternative explanations such as “remote touch” of atoms and “unextended contact,” that is, contact at a point (an explanation that might work if atoms were all curved in the right way, but there is no evidence for such an idea in Epicurus). Hasper, “The Foundations of Presocratic Atomism” proposes (at least for Democritus) the principle that unity cannot arise out of plurality and vice versa to explain why two atoms cannot merge into one.

<sup>18</sup> See Furley, *Two Studies in the Greek Atomists*, 128–29.

<sup>19</sup> Epicurus’s *Ep. Hdt.* 62, which discusses atomic motions in compound bodies, is exceptionally dense, but I think it is clear that atoms continue to move at one minimum of space per minimum of time even as they rebound from frequent collisions. Their overall velocity in any given direction over a perceptible interval of time is of course variable (for a different view, see Verde, “Minimi temporali” and *Epistola a Erodoto*, 182–87, who argues that the idea of temporal minima arose somewhat later, though it perhaps goes back to Epicurus himself; Verde has now elaborated on this question, and on all aspects of minima in Epicureanism, in Verde, *Elachista*, which is the authoritative study of the sources). On Islamic doctrine and its possible debt to Epicureanism, see Konstan, “Ancient Atomism and Its Heritage.”

<sup>20</sup> Laks, “Minima und noematische Geeschwindigkeit” observes that, despite the testimony of Simplicius (*Ad Phys.* Diels 925.13–22 = Usener 268; Diels 938.17–22 = Usener 277) and Themistius

(*Ad Phys.* Schenkl 184.11–13 = Usener 278a, where the idea that atoms do not move over minimal units of space but rather “have moved” is ascribed to Epicurus), Epicurus argued (*Ep. Hdt.* 46–47) for the equal speed of atoms not so much with reference to Aristotle’s puzzles in *Physics* Book 6 concerning the necessary correlation between minima of space, time, and motion, but rather with reference to Aristotle’s argument in Book 4 to the effect that motion in an absolute void must be infinitely rapid; Epicurus chose rather to describe atoms as covering every “comprehensible interval” (*perilēpton mēkos*) in an unthinkable time (*aperinoētōi khronōi*), that is, a very small temporal interval: their motion is inconceivably fast, but not infinite. Epicurus explains the high atomic velocity as due to the absence of collisions in the void, which does not necessarily constitute a response to Aristotle, though he may well have had Aristotle’s claims in mind; the two lines of argument mesh nicely, as Laks points out, and might well go back to Epicurus himself rather than to the doxographical tradition, as Laks believes likely. For Epicurus’s notion of incomprehensibly large magnitudes, see below.

<sup>21</sup> Epicurus’s notion of weight, which he ascribed to atoms, perhaps served as a reason why atoms should always be on the move, with a motion that would necessarily be of uniform velocity for the reasons given (cf. Simplicius *Ad Phys.* 9.697.32–35, citing Alexander of Aphrodisias); but I believe that weight in fact had another function, as will be made clear below.

<sup>22</sup> Just what a minimalistic geometry might look like, and whether Epicurus or his colleagues developed such a theory, is debated; for an overview, see Angeli and Dorandi, “Gli epicurei e la geometria,” who remark (p. 3) that the Epicurean theory was not merely negative but “aveva compreso anche una fase costruttiva attraverso la proposta di un tipo di geometria ‘atomistica’ coerente con l’ontologia proposta dal fondatore del Giardino.” For a more detailed treatment, see Angeli and Dorandi, “Il pensiero matematico di Demetrio Lacone”; further discussion of Epicureanism and geometry in Bénatouil, “Les critiques épicuriennes de la géométrie,” who observes (p. 157): “Il est certes difficile d’admettre qu’une véritable ‘géométrie’ (au sens des mathématiciens antiques) atomiste ou finitiste ait été développée par les épicuriens, et ce d’autant plus qu’on n’en conserve aucune trace”; also Giovvachini, “L’angle et l’atome dans la physique Epicurienne.”

<sup>23</sup> *Ep. Hdt.* 42; for Epicurus’s conception of conceivability and inconceivability, see Konstan, “Περὶληψις in Epicurean Epistemology.”

<sup>24</sup> *Ep. Hdt.* 42, 46–47; cf. *Lucr.* 4.141–217; the nature and movement of *eidōla*, the simulacra or films emitted by visible objects, was discussed in the second book of Epicurus’s *On Nature*; see Leone, *Epicuro Sulla natura libro II*, esp. 116–31.

<sup>25</sup> See Chaitin, “The Limits of Reason,” 79.

<sup>26</sup> For limited variation as a way of accounting for the discreteness of species, see De Lacy, “Limit and Variation in the Epicurean Philosophy.”

<sup>27</sup> Sextus Empiricus *M.* 11.59 = SV 3.122; so too for the number of grains of sand on a beach: *M.* 8.147, cf. Catullus 7.

<sup>28</sup> The mathematician Archytas of Tarentum (Diels-Kranz 47A24) made much the same argument as Epicurus; cf. Verde, *Epistola a Erodoto*, 101.

<sup>29</sup> The principle of *isonomia* or “distributive equality,” mentioned by Cicero (*ND* 50, 109), indicates that scarcities in one local region are complemented by abundance in another; as a result, the distribution of items over large regions is uniform. For discussion, see Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, 155–57.

<sup>30</sup> For a more detailed discussion of atomic weight, see Konstan, “Problems in Epicurean Physics,” 408–17; for very full discussion of Democritus’s conception of weight, see O’Brien, *Theories of Weight in the Ancient World*, who takes weight to be a function of atomic size, and hence not an independent atomic property.

<sup>31</sup> The idea of an absolute frame of reference, with respect to which things may be said to move or be at rest, is intuitively plausible but mathematically otiose, and incompatible with modern relativity theory; see Feigl, “The Origin and Spirit of Logical Positivism”; Koslow, “Ontological and Ideological Issues.”

<sup>32</sup> For further discussion, see Konstan, “Epicurus on Up and Down”; see also Bredlow Wenda, “Epicurus’ *Letter to Herodotus*: Some Textual Notes,” 171–73 for the plausible emendation in the *Letter to Herodotus* 60 of ἡ τὸ ὑποκάτω to ἡ τὸ ὑποκάτω.

<sup>33</sup> The word for “blow,” *plēgēi*, was emended out of the text by Usener, but it is confirmed by a passage in Cicero’s *On Fate*: “The atom, says he [Epicurus], swerves. In the first place, why? For they had another kind of power of motion from Democritus, which he calls ‘the blow of collision,’ and from you, Epicurus, the blow of heaviness and weight” (*declinat, inquit, atomus, primum cur? aliam enim quandam vim motus habebant a Democrito impulsione quam plagam ille appellat, a te, Epicure, gravitatis et ponderis*, 20.46). There is also another reason to prefer the connection between downward motion and collisions to the idea that (relatively) upward-moving atoms change direction because of weight alone: one would have expected, in the latter case, the kind of criticism that was heaped on Epicurus’s theory of the swerve (see below). Bear in mind that rising atoms cannot gradually slow down, reverse course, and begin to accelerate, for they must always travel at a uniform speed.

<sup>34</sup> Apart from Aristotle, Epicurus may have been responding to Plato or to Strato of Lampsacus; see Verde, *Epistola a Erodoto*, 176–78.

<sup>35</sup> For popular accounts of asymmetry in the universe, including at the atomic level, see Gardner, *The Ambidextrous Universe*; McManus, *Right Hand Left Hand*, 137–40.

<sup>36</sup> Lucretius affirms (*DRN* 5.534–49) that the earth is more or less stationary relative to its immediate environment (that is, cosmos), since it is interconnected with the air atoms that surround it; thus, it does not weigh upon the atmosphere beneath it any more than one feels one’s head to be a burden to one’s body.

<sup>37</sup> On *ekthlipsis*, cf. *Ep. Hdt.* 53, *Ep. Pyth.* 109; Simplicius on *De caelo* (= Democritus Diels-Kranz A61) ascribes the doctrine of *ekthlipsis* to Democritus and Epicurus.

<sup>38</sup> For the idea that objects on the underside of the earth would fall off it, cf. *Lucr. DRN* 1.1061–67; the text is damaged, but the argument is evidently aimed at the Aristotelian or Stoic idea that the antipodes of the earth are inhabited.

<sup>39</sup> Full discussion in Konstan, “Epicurus on Up and Down.”

## CHAPTER 4

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# COSMOLOGY AND METEOROLOGY

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DARYN LEHOUX

AFTER framing his literary preliminaries, Lucretius begins his great *De rerum natura* with a promise to explain the workings of the heavens:

For I shall begin to explain to you the highest *ratio* of heaven and the gods, and I shall lay open the first-beginnings of things (1.54–55).<sup>1</sup>

It is striking that he promises an explanation of the *caeli ratio*, the reason or system of the heavens, even before he has made any actual mention of atoms, the main subject and central explanatory cause of his entire philosophy. The reason, though, is perhaps straightforward, and rests in the overarching emphasis in Epicurean philosophy on physics as a means to ethics. Fear, after all, is the primary ethical problem that Epicureanism promises to overcome, and fear of the gods (paired later in the poem with the fear of death) is the greatest of the fears faced by humans. Thus a physical explanation of the phenomena that are—on his telling at any rate—most closely associated with people’s greatest fears (in this instance the heavens as signs of calamity) should bring us the most happiness. As Epicurus puts it in *Key Doctrine* 11:

If apprehensions did not trouble us about things in the heavens, or about death (as though that were something to us), or yet the misunderstanding of the limits to suffering and hope, we should have been in no need of natural science.

Fear, then is the driving force behind any investigation into nature, and fear of “the things in the heavens” is one of the primary problems singled out. Accordingly, the de-divinization of the sky becomes a keystone of Epicurean philosophy.

There are two things to note here before we proceed. One is the way in which the framing of the problem around “signs people fear from the gods” brings together astronomy, astrology, cosmology, and meteorology, as well as their associated omens, so neatly—these subjects are not so thematically or indeed physically united in all ancient philosophies. The second is that we as modern readers of Epicurus should flag this emphasis on people’s superstitious fears (to use Epicurus’s own category) and handle it with care, for it is a key piece of Epicurean propaganda to say that everyone but them is running around trembling in terror at the signs and potential punishments of the gods. Stoics, Academics, and Peripatetics would all likely fail to see reflections of themselves in this simplistic account, but it is a common enough ancient characterization of the fears of what we might call the masses, and one that Stoics and Academics likewise employed as a ready exhortation to (their) philosophy.

## THE SHAPE(S) OF THE WORLD

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The Epicurean cosmos itself stands in stark contrast to most other ancient cosmologies. By the third century BCE, a consensus had emerged among most philosophers who discussed such matters that the cosmos was both finite and spherical. This was based on a combination of observational evidence and philosophical argument. For example, the stars are seen to rotate around the earth daily in a pattern that is entirely consistent with their placement on a sphere. If the cosmos were infinite, however, then this observed rotation of the stars around the earth in twenty-four hours would have to be the completion of an infinitely long orbital motion in a finite time. For Aristotle (and, with slight variants, for Stoics and others as well) the sphericity of the cosmos was what allowed it to rotate at all. In sharp

contrast, the Epicureans argued that the whole must be infinite, and contain an infinite number of worlds (κόσμοι), of which ours is but one.

Epicurus supports the infinity of the whole on the grounds that a finite body must have an extremity, and the very idea of an extremity presupposes something beyond itself (*Ep. Hdt.* 41). Lucretius expands this idea (1.968) with an elegant thought experiment: what if someone were to stand just inside the extremity of a finite cosmos and throw a spear directly at its outer edge? Would the spear be hindered from passing beyond the cosmos (implying that there is something outside resisting the spear's progress), or would it carry on through the outer limit (implying that there is something beyond that "limit" for it to move through)? Beyond this thought experiment, both Epicurus and Lucretius proceed to offer other arguments for the infinity of the cosmos. One is an argument for the existence of infinite matter, which infinity would imply an infinite cosmos in which to house it all (*Ep. Hdt.* 57). Epicurus proves that both matter and void are infinite by assuming in turn that each is in fact finite while the other is infinite, and drawing a contradiction in both cases (*Ep. Hdt.* 42, cf. *Lucr.* 1.1008f.). The fact that he never contemplates the case where both may be finite without contradiction depends on his prior acceptance of the proof of the infinity of the whole universe (emerging from the impossibility of its having a limit, as we have seen).

Within the infinite whole, we live in one of an infinite number of actual worlds (*cosmoi*), which need not be the same shape as our own. Whether Epicurus thinks our own cosmos to be spherical or not is unstated in his extant writings, although Cicero (*ND* 2.48) tells us that it is a favorite saying of the Epicureans that it is uncertain that our *mundum* is a sphere, and that it could be some other shape. (*Mundum* here likely refers to the cosmos as a whole rather than just the earth—cf. the scholiast to *DL* 10.74.) Moreover, Cicero continues, the many worlds could also be many shapes.<sup>2</sup> Epicurus also adds (*Ep. Pyth.* 89) that new worlds can come into existence, presumably at any time, if there is an introduction of suitable "seeds" to allow their growth. This can happen in the interstices between existing worlds (μετακόσμοι), or even within an existing world itself. He tells us, in a string of agricultural metaphors, that these seeds must be "watered" and then must mature and "keep" (using a Greek word that is often associated with grain) in the presence of a suitable foundation if a world is to be produced.



The shape of the earth itself is described nowhere in the extant fragments of Epicurus or in Lucretius, although Rist cites evidence from Diogenes of Oenoanda and from a scholiast to Diogenes Laertius to argue that it may be a flat disc resting on air in the center of our cosmos.<sup>3</sup> Diogenes of Oenoanda does in fact mention a “ceremonial drum” in connection with what appears to be a cosmogony, though the implication is opaque to me. Lucretius at one point (1.1058–67) pokes fun at the idea that there could be creatures walking around on the other side of the earth from us, with their “down” equal to our “up,” and many commentators have taken this to be an assertion of a flat earth, although it only really entails that nothing could live opposite us, which would be consistent with a spherical (or almost-any-other-shaped) earth that is only habitable on top.<sup>4</sup> That the earth, whatever its shape, could rest on the air below it is explained in Lucretius (5.534–63) by analogy to the way parts of the human body have no noticeable weight when carried around by the whole. We notice even the slightest additional weight in a pack or a satchel, but because the body itself is a unity, the head and the limbs are no burden to it normally. Similarly, Lucretius tells us, because the earth and the air beneath it are a unity, the earth is no burden to that air, and so has no compulsion to fall downwards.<sup>5</sup> As a second analogy, Lucretius points to the way our soul, light and insubstantial though it may be, is capable of lifting up our entire body and even of causing that body to jump into the air contrary to its natural inclination downwards.

“Downwards” as the direction to which things fall is a concept with considerable, if sometimes puzzling, force in Epicurean cosmology and physics. For Aristotle, the Stoics, and often for Academics, downwards is defined as “toward the center of the cosmos,” which coincides with the center of the earth. Since the Epicureans live in an infinite universe, there can be no center towards which things would tend, and so “down” for them seems to be one single, parallel direction in all *cosmoi* as opposed to the relative direction it is in other philosophical systems (where my “down” is in a certain sense the “up” of my antipodes). Nowhere do we get an explicit statement of how or why bodies fall downwards in Epicureanism beyond the simple statement that bodies have weight. This fact, however, is sufficient to privilege down as the direction toward which all atoms would fall if it were not for atomic collisions directing them elsewhere. There is no sense that atoms are *attracted* downwards in any way (and indeed no

mechanism for such an attraction), just the statement that, *ceteris paribus*, all atoms move in that direction. Indeed, the downward motion of atoms in the infinite universe is, at least in part, what seems to have necessitated the introduction of the Epicurean “swerve” in the first place.<sup>6</sup> For, as Lucretius says (2.216–24), if there were no swerve, all atoms would simply be falling downward in a completely parallel and necessarily unending shower, which, because speed of motion is inversely proportional to resistance, is also infinitely fast. The swerve—even just the slightest random inclination away from direct falling—enables atoms to collide in what turns out to be the endless chain-reaction of interacting atoms whose effects we in fact see. One presumes that somewhere in the flotsam of all of this discussion of downward atomic motion lies the explanation for falling macrocosmic bodies (things like rocks tend to move preferentially downward rather than in any other direction because this is the direction heavy bodies naturally move), although the idea is never fully elaborated.

## MULTIPLE CAUSES

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When it comes to discussing the actual causes of both motion in the heavens and of meteorological phenomena, Epicurus appeals to the same method: since we cannot have direct access to the heavenly realms we must reason by analogy from things in our experience to those farther off (*Ep. Pyth.* 87). But as soon as he outlines this method in the *Letter to Herodotus*, Epicurus adjoins analogy to multiplicity: “thus we must investigate heavenly phenomena (τῶν μετεώρων) and any other unclear things by comparison to the different ways in which what-is-similar happens near to us” (*Ep. Hdt.* 80). Because of, one presumes, the slippage in what counts as what-is-similar down here (or perhaps in which features of it are most relevant) we inevitably end up with a plurality of mechanisms as models for heavenly phenomena.<sup>7</sup> No matter, says Epicurus, for we do not need to know which exact cause is responsible for heavenly phenomena, so long as we are satisfied that one of the available causes must be the right one—to avoid fear, the heavens do not need to be explained so much as to be demonstrably explainable.<sup>8</sup> Epicurus even makes the point that, in the absence of certain knowledge of the available atomic causes, an expert

knowledge of astronomy (“of stellar risings and settings and of solstices and eclipses and so on”) is so far from allaying fear as to actually worsen it, since the expert will be all the more alarmed that he cannot physically account for the phenomena that he predicts mathematically (*Ep. Hdt.* 79).

This explainability of distant phenomena in more than one way, along with the epistemologico-ethical dictate that such explanation should be satisfactory to eliminate fear, forms the core of what is called Epicurean multiple explanation, and it is the heavens that become the most natural and most fully elaborated home for multiple explanation in Epicurean sources. “Cosmology and meteorology,” the topic of the present chapter, is not a natural pairing in the modern sciences. But for Epicureans, they are quite easily brought together in that they share identical methods of and limitations to obtaining knowledge, as well as their shared emphasis on the acceptability, and indeed the necessity, of multiple explanation.

Multiple explanation of heavenly phenomena comes with an explicit parity clause in the *Letter to Pythocles*: so long as any competing explanations are “similarly in agreement with the phenomena” (*Ep. Pyth.* 87), we cannot prefer one over the other. To do so would be to “collapse into myth.” This condition forces assertions of equal plausibility for some cosmological claims that look *prima facie* to be extraordinarily unlikely (and must have appeared so to the Epicureans’ contemporaries as well). For example, both Epicurus and Lucretius tell us that it is equally possible that day and night are caused by (a) the sun going around the earth, or (b) the sun being extinguished each night and rekindled each morning (*Ep. Pyth.* 92; *Lucr. DRN* 5.650–55).<sup>9</sup> The latter claim is taken as *the* Epicurean theory by the Stoic astronomer Cleomedes (perhaps late second century CE), who proceeds to attack it mercilessly on empirical grounds (*Caelestia* 2.1.426–37). We can, however, infer from the wording in the earlier Epicurean sources that such counterevidence was either unavailable or simply dismissed (“no phenomenon testifies against [extinguishing and rekindling],” says Epicurus).

Indeed, when he does offer explicit explanations for far-off phenomena, one often gets the impression that the very listing of multiple causes is in itself more important than actual attempts at explanation. That is to say, where there was considerable contemporary agreement on phenomena such as the causes of eclipses or of lunar phases, Epicurus seems to take a special delight in confounding these explanations with some of their wilder

counterparts and claiming what appears to be equal likelihood. One would be hard-pressed to find contemporaries of Epicurus who thought that lunar phases were caused by the moon's rotation between a light side and a dark side, or that they were caused by "configurations of the air," or by other objects blocking our view of part of the moon on a regular (indeed predictable) basis (*Ep. Pyth.* 94). Nevertheless, Epicurus parades each one in turn as a plausible explanation consistent with the phenomena, with, apparently, no real effort to eliminate or de-emphasize any explanation that may seem on the face of it to be possible. The epistemological point about the importance or necessity of multiple explanation thus appears often to outweigh attempts to decide between explanations even when it must have seemed possible to do so to the Epicureans' contemporaries and competitors.

An important Epicurean concern here is that even if we could eliminate one or more of the competing hypotheses by observation, we would only be doing so in our own cosmos, which is, after all, only one of an infinite number of *cosmoi*. Multiple explanations, it seems, are not just multiple possibilities for what is true of our own particular world-environment, but are also rooted in the Epicurean commitment to multiple worlds across which multiple causes may account for identical or at least similar phenomena, as Lucretius tells us explicitly at 5.526–30:

For which of these causes holds in our world it is difficult to say for certain; but what may be done and is done though the whole universe in the various worlds made in various ways, that is what I teach, proceeding to set forth several causes which may account for the movements of the stars throughout the whole universe.

It is worth noting that not every phenomenon is up for grabs. Mundane, earthly phenomena often seem secure enough throughout the Epicurean corpus: the motion of dust motes, for example, or the phenomena of compressibility or of sound propagation are never accounted for in terms of multiple explanation.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless there are a few earthly phenomena that allow of multiple explanation in Epicurean sources. Lucretius, for example, discusses the possible causes of the flooding of the Nile in just this way (see 6.712–37)—and the flooding of the Nile was a common source of speculation and uncertainty in antiquity—but it is very much the exception to the confidence he shows in explaining virtually all other earthly phenomena. By contrast, nearly all heavenly phenomena were treated as

multiply explainable. The one exception seems to be the Epicurean insistence, ridiculed mercilessly by contemporaries, that the sun and moon were just the sizes they appeared to be and no more.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, we are not always offered a full list of the specific (equi-probable?) multiple explanations of heavenly phenomena. In the *Letter to Herodotus*, for example, Epicurus assures us that multiple explanations will be sufficient to overcome fear of astronomical phenomena, but he does not there tell us what those multiple explanations might be, only that there are some and they are satisfactory. So, too, in the *Letter to Pythocles*, we see him often cut short a (sometimes quite vague) list of possible causes with a blanket caveat that any cause not inconsistent with the phenomena will do. Thus in his discussion of the face in the moon, he offers us two possible but very general causes, “it may be due to variation in [the moon’s] parts, or to an interposition,” before emphasizing the more wide-open “or in as many other ways as may be seen to have agreement with the phenomena” (*Ep. Pyth.* 94). Occasionally, he specifically cites avoidance of *myth* as the primary desideratum (see, e.g., *Ep. Pyth.* 104, 116)—anything else, it seems, will do so long as it is not counter-evidenced.

This ethical and epistemological turn in Epicureanism has the curious effect that what has appeared to many modern commentators to be the most materialistic and least teleological of ancient philosophies (in short, the most scientific) represents at the same time a deliberate turning away from examination, experiment, and the elimination of competing hypotheses for astronomical, cosmological, and meteorological phenomena. This stands as a sharp reminder that ancient philosophies often have very foreign priorities to our own.

## METEOROLOGY

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Thunder, like astronomical phenomena, is presented by Lucretius as one of the great causes of human fear and dread of the gods. The cure for this is right understanding, which can only be gleaned from comparison to analogous phenomena closer to home. He offers us early on in Book 6 a host of causes for the different kinds of thunder, and in almost every instance a familiar analogy. Sometimes clouds crash together or scrape past

each other with a rasping sound. Sometimes they crack in the wind like sheets on a clothesline. Whirlwinds can form a hollow of air within an outer shell of cloud, and this, when burst, behaves like an air-filled bladder does when popped (the same analogy is used also by Pliny and Seneca, though with quite different import in Seneca).<sup>12</sup> Depending on the shape of a cloud, winds may cause sounds as they blow through it, in the same way as winds can rustle leaves. Alternatively, the wind may simply crash into and tear open a cloud, presumably with some kind of cracking sound (Lucr. 6.140–41 makes the comparison to an uprooted tree in this instance). Clouds sometimes roll and break like waves. Sometimes lightning from a higher cloud becomes extinguished in a watery lower cloud, emitting a sound in the same way as iron does in tempering. Or lightning from above can ignite a dryer cloud, emitting a sound like the sudden conflagration of a dry stand of laurel.

If Lucretius here may be seen to be offering us multiple causes for multiple kinds of thunder, which is to say one cause for each kind, Epicurus's treatment in the *Letter to Pythocles* makes it clearer that multiple explanation is to be understood here too in its broader, epistemological, sense. He first offers us several possible mechanisms for the formation of clouds (compression by winds, simple atomic entanglement, "streams" rising from the earth) and then adds that there are more ways for it to happen that are "not impossible" (*Ep. Pyth.* 99–100). The causes of rain are then parasitic on the causes of clouds, and are treated fairly cursorily. Rain is simply said to be caused by compression, by "changes," by "streams from suitable places," or by "certain aggregations." When Epicurus turns to causes of thunder we find a little more detail, and he offers us a set that bears a family resemblance to what we have seen in Lucretius, but differs considerably in detail. So Epicurus tells us that winds can roll in the "hollows" of clouds, or can stoke fires within clouds. Clouds can, when hardened like ice, split and crack with a great sound. None of these mechanisms are paralleled in Lucretius, even if the use of analogy by both authors points to an identity of method. Finally, and perhaps predictably, Epicurus closes with a nod to multiple explanation: "for this part as for the whole, the phenomena elicit multiple explanations" (*Ep. Pyth.* 100).

Lightning is said by Epicurus to be caused by friction between clouds, or else—mirroring some of the vagueness from his theory of rain—by the wind sending out from clouds bodies that are merely said to be "provided



with brightness” (*Ep. Pyth.* 101). Lightning can be squeezed out of clouds by condensation (he offers us no analogy here), or else light from the stars may be collected in the clouds only to be released by winds or the cloud’s motions later. He gives an alternate version of this theory, possibly textually corrupted,<sup>13</sup> in which the “smallest-particled” light seems to be coming through the clouds from above in real time, and somehow turning into lightning within the cloud. Or winds could simply cause combustion in clouds. Finally, the rending of clouds by wind may allow “fire-generating atoms” to escape. Epicurus closes the discussion with another broad-church nod to multiple explanation.

Both Lucretius and Epicurus liken the delay between the sight of lightning and the sound of thunder to what happens when we see and hear someone striking blows in the distance (for Lucretius, with an ax), where we see the blow before we hear the sound. Curiously, though, Epicurus also offers an alternative version where the lightning is actually caused first and the thunder physically delayed for a moment by being “rolled up” (*ἀνελούμενον*: *Ep. Pyth.* 102)—a verb used in Ps.-Aristotle’s *De audibilibus* (804a20) to describe how the human voice sometimes catches in the throat, and in the Hippocratic *Prognosticon* (11.30) to refer to pent-up flatulence.

At the end of the discussion, Epicurus offers us his now-familiar refrain: *καὶ κατ’ ἄλλους δὲ τρόπους πλείονας ἐνδέχεται κεραυνοὺς ἀποτελλεῖσθαι*, “and thunderbolts can be produced in other ways too,” a formula that (in reference to different subjects) recurs verbatim six times in the *Letter to Pythocles* with only minor variations in wording (*πλείους* for *πλείονας*, and one minor shift in word order).<sup>14</sup>

Epicurus further offers us multiple explanations for seasonal weather changes, whirlwinds, snow, dew, ice, halos, shooting stars, and wind. He gives one of the common and standard ancient explanations for earthquakes (subterranean winds—which is how earthquakes end up in the province of ancient meteorology), but adds that they may also be caused by a collapse of structures underground, or “in other ways as well” (again with the formulaic *καὶ κατ’ ἄλλους δὲ πλείους τρόπους*, *Ep. Pyth.* 106). Lucretius mirrors these two causes, adding two more that are unparalleled in the surviving works of Epicurus, and importantly adding that earthquakes are a primary cause of fear among people (5.1236–40). The additional causes



adduced by Lucretius depend on large rocks being moved by, or moved into, subterranean waters (6.535–56).<sup>15</sup> Like the rumblings of even small carts on the street shaking our houses, he says, these motions can have larger effects than may at first be obvious. Lucretius also adds, repeating the point several times, that the existence of earthquakes proves that the earth cannot last forever, a lesson he thinks it important for the right-reasoning philosopher to remember.

Finally, the rainbow, a difficult subject that gets extended treatment in other ancient sources, is given very cursory explanation by Epicurus and Lucretius both (perhaps because there is no problem of fear associated with it). Epicurus says, apparently with explanatory intent, that rainbows happen when the sun shines onto “water-like” air—but note that this cannot be properly seen as a mechanism, only as a description of conditions. Alternatively, rainbows happen by a “particular blending of light and air” that then shines back on the air and brings about color. Lucretius gives even shorter treatment to the question of how the rainbow is formed, simply saying that it occurs when the sun shines against showers opposite to it (6.524–26), once again substituting a simple description of its conditions for a genuine causal account. If we compare these approaches to the great lengths that Aristotle or Seneca goes to in exploring minute details of the rainbow and its possible mechanisms, we see how very different the focus of Epicurean physics could be relative to its contemporaries.

Finally, Epicurus accounts for the *shape* of the rainbow, again both multiply and brusquely, as the result either of our “see[ing] the whole thing with our eyes as equidistant” (*Ep. Pyth.* 110) or of the physical aggregation in the clouds and the sun occurring in “a kind of circle.”

## PLACE OF THE GODS

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When Epicurus introduces cosmology in the *Letter to Herodotus*, he does so in the context of a rejection of the divinity of the stars, and even of their guidance by divine hands. Such beliefs were very widespread in antiquity and so this constitutes one of Epicureanism’s more radical breaks with contemporary philosophical opinion. The belief in the divinity of the stars,

says Epicurus, leads to the “greatest disturbance” (τάραχος ὁ κυριώτατος: *Ep. Hdt.* 81) of the human soul.

Not only are the stars non-divine, but for the Epicureans the gods themselves are famously uninterested in the governance of the universe.<sup>16</sup> Since they are perfect beings, the argument goes, they must be untroubled by the chaos of the universe as a whole. This raises the question of whether they can or should be seen to exist at all, but for Epicurus their importance as models of tranquility makes them central—if in a way that contemporaries often found bizarre or unacceptable—to Epicurean ethics. Since the only existents for Epicureans had to be made up of atoms and void, though, the existence of the gods necessitated that they, too, consisted of atoms and void, and this raises the question of *where*, then, they could be in the universe such that they could remain untroubled (if not, perhaps, completely unaffected) by the never-ending chaos of atomic interactions. Epicurus’s answer seems to have been to place them in the interstices between the actual *cosmoi* (Cic. *ND* 1.18, *De div.* 2.40) or in some other sense “far off” (Lucr. 2.646, 5.146).<sup>17</sup> They exist physically in the universe, that is, but in some way or in some place that separates them out from atomic interaction or decay (or perhaps from *much* atomic interaction or decay).

## COSMIC MOTIONS

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What is perhaps most surprising is that of all the causes adduced for astronomical and meteorological phenomena, very few of them are given with specific reference to atoms and the void. We are offered analogies to familiar macrocosmic and earthly phenomena and references to familiar processes such as blending, obscuring, diluting, and freezing, but only rarely are atoms mentioned specifically as the causes of heavenly phenomena. In many cases, were it not for the insistence on multiple explanation, we would be hard pressed to identify the meteorological causes as specifically Epicurean. When it comes to accounts of how a cosmos comes to be, however, we see more clearly the presence of key atomist conjectures as foundations.

In the first instance, *cosmoi* form by the chance (*τυχαίαν*: Ps.-Plut. *Plac.* 878c) aggregation of atoms into sensible bodies. Atoms come together, Lucretius tells us (5.437–48), by the mechanism of “like attracting like,” a law of nature invoked in a wide variety of ancient explanatory contexts.<sup>18</sup> As the process gets elaborated in Lucretius, we see the tenacity of many Aristotelian and earlier ideas in the references to the four traditional elements of earth, water, fire, and air, and an account of how they find their respective places in the cosmos, the earth and water at the bottom, and fire and air at the top. Nevertheless, there is no commitment here to the four elements as explanatorily basic, but instead a sense that Lucretius is explaining these familiar entities only to subsume them under the more fundamental atoms. Where for Aristotle earth moved to the bottom with water above it due to their relative weights, and these in turn were surrounded by air and fire according to their relative lightness, Lucretius offers us something a little more complex. Earth still comes to settle at the bottom of the system, but instead of invoking weight as the only cause, Lucretius also invokes atomic shape. Because of the large, “interwoven” nature of the atoms in earth as compared to the smaller, rounder atoms of water, the water came to be squeezed out of the original chaotic mixture of random atoms as the like atoms of earth came to entangle with each other. The atoms of ether, fire, and air, being smaller still, rise even farther up, and we see a curious echo of the Aristotelian layered cosmology (earth at the bottom and ether on top) emerge in the end but from a rather different physical mechanism. Lucretius even goes so far as to say that the outermost ether encircled the rest all around (4.468 *circumdatus undique flexit*), a phrase that is difficult to read as implying anything other than a spherical cosmos—so deep, perhaps, did established cosmological imagery run.

As he outlines this process of atomic separation of earth and the other traditional elements, Lucretius adds a second mechanism for further refinement (4.471–503): the upper elements press on the lower ones causing more water, air, and fire to squeeze out of the earthy mixture at the bottom. In the midst of all this, the sun and moon form in the upper regions at a place appropriate to them (neither too high nor too low). The heavens move because of currents of air, just as water-wheels are moved in rivers, although Lucretius hedges on whether the whole heavens turn, or whether there is an unmoved outer shell and only the constellations underneath are turned in this way. The currents that move the heavens may be from outside

the cosmos proper, or may be a rushing tide running entirely within. This water-wheel-like whirling, as a cause of motion, is also seen to be weakening as it progresses from the outermost parts of the cosmos to the inner. This is then invoked to account for the slower motion of the sun than of the constellations: the weakened force causes the sun to fall back slightly, day by day, eventually traversing the entire zodiac in a year, a mechanism Lucretius explicitly traces to Democritus (Lucr. 5.621–36). Lucretius also cites currents of air to account for the sun’s motion to the north and south of the equator, this time with the currents running perpendicular to those that cause it to orbit in its daily motion. Curiously, rather than looking to the standard geometrical explanations of why days are longer in summer than winter (i.e., by tracing the daily arcs of various points on the inclined great circle of the ecliptic above the horizon), Lucretius quite unusually tries to find another air-based explanation, offering as an apparently serious possibility that the air through which the sun moves at night in the winter is “thicker,” causing a delay to sunrise in that season (5.696–700).

In a similar vein, we see heavenly airs that are unsuitable for combustion invoked as one possible cause of both lunar and solar eclipses. This idea that the air through which the sun and moon travel is crucial to their combustion seems reinforced by an account earlier in Book 5 (235–305) where Lucretius places the light shed by the sun and moon in the larger context of a cyclical system of evaporation, absorption, combustion, and reseedling. The sun and moon send down light, which replenishes the matter on earth that has evaporated, which evaporation seems also to be a source of the combustion by which the sun and moon send down their light in the first place. That the stars are nourished by earthly vapors is a commonplace of several ancient cosmologies, and seems to have solved the problem of how the heavenly fires could continue burning unless they had access to some kind of fuel. The larger Epicurean moral from this, though, is that all things are born, and all things die. As the various parts change and are destroyed (though their atoms survive to play new roles elsewhere in the system), so too the whole cosmos will be subject to eventual destruction. What this reinforces so effectively for Lucretius is the idea that the dissolution of the atoms in our souls at death is mirrored in the complete dissolution of whole *cosmoi*—atomic compounds are never immortal however large and interconnected, or firm and grand, they now may seem. It is this very idea of complete dissolution that, when applied to the human

soul, gives us the famous insight that “death is nothing to us.”<sup>19</sup> How much more clearly can we see this in the context of the ultimate and inevitable destruction of all macrocosmic entities? Fear, then, even fear of death, is pointless.

## CONCLUSION

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Cosmology and meteorology are united as traditional sources of superstitious fear: fear of the gods, fear of thunder and lightning, fear of portents, fear of death. Like other ancient philosophies, Epicurus claimed he alone could teach us not to fear these things, but his method for doing so diverges sharply from those of other ancient philosophical systems. Where the Stoics appealed to divine providence and rationality, Epicurus appeals to the absolute absence of divinity in the workings of the heavens and earth. Where the Stoics believed in signs of the future through the interconnectedness of all things, Epicurus instead appeals to (at least occasional) random causes and ultimately purposeless atomic motion. On the other hand, the Epicurean insistence on multiple explanation (acknowledged with respect to, and possibly even rooted in, the epistemological problems associated with reasoning by analogy), meant that otherwise commonly accepted mechanisms for heavenly phenomena, were (almost mischievously) intertwined with other explanations as apparently equally possible. So eclipses may be caused by bad air, the moon may be extinguished and then born anew at each rising—at the correct phase, and at predictable times no less. Some of these more implausible claims (at least by the standards of their contemporaries) saw Epicureans handled with incredulity in competing sources, but nevertheless they are rooted in the epistemological insistence that we would need counter-evidence to dismiss them—and perhaps they insisted in practice on very strong counter-evidence—as well as the ethical insistence that it didn’t really matter how any of these phenomena happened, so long as there was *some* explanation that did not invoke the superstition-generating and fear-mongering gods. Perhaps the sometimes cheeky-looking implausibility of the mechanisms and analogies on offer was a way of hammering this last point home.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> This last point may be rooted in the Epicurean doctrine of multiple explanation (more on this presently).

<sup>3</sup> Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction*, 47 n. 4. The fragment of Diogenes of Oenoanda is in Smith, "New Fragments of Diogenes of Oenoanda," new fragment 7, col. ii.12–13.

<sup>4</sup> This last point is a necessity given the Epicurean account of falling bodies (more on which in a moment). On the shape of the earth, see, e.g., Taub, "Cosmology and Meteorology"; Furley, "Cosmology."

<sup>5</sup> Contrast Konstan, "Epicurus," who argues that the earth simply falls more slowly than other objects in the cosmos.

<sup>6</sup> If Cicero, *De fato*, is to be believed, there may also be an element of antideterminism involved. See also the contributions of Konstan and Englert in this volume.

<sup>7</sup> See also *Ep. Pyth.* 87.

<sup>8</sup> See Hankinson, "Lucretius, Epicurus, and the Logic of Multiple Explanations."

<sup>9</sup> Theory (b) is possibly a reference back to Heraclitus B6.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., *Lucr. DRN* 1.354–69, 2.112–28.

<sup>11</sup> See *Epicurus Ep. Pyth.* 91; *Lucr. DRN* 5.564 f.; *Cleomedes Cael.* 2.1, 3.1.

<sup>12</sup> See *Pliny NH* 2.113; *Seneca NQ* 2.27.3; for commentary on Seneca's use, see Lehoux, *What Did the Romans Know?*, ch. 4.

<sup>13</sup> The sentence as it stands in the MSS clearly requires emendation, and several fixes have been proposed by different editors. For details, see the apparatus in Marcovitch, *Diogenis Laertii Vitae philosophorum*, 1.775–76.

<sup>14</sup> At *Ep. Pyth.* 99, 102, 104, 106, 108, 112.

<sup>15</sup> In the latter case, the text is unclear whether the waters need be necessarily underground or could be lakes or oceans up above.

<sup>16</sup> See the chapter in this volume by Spinelli and Verde.

<sup>17</sup> See Konstan, “Epicurus on the Gods.”

<sup>18</sup> See Lehoux, *What Did the Romans Know?*, chs. 3 and 5.

<sup>19</sup> See Rosenbaum’s chapter in this volume.



## CHAPTER 5

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# THEOLOGY

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EMIDIO SPINELLI AND FRANCESCO  
VERDE

### *EPICURUS “CORYPHAeus OF ATHEISM”?*

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FROM the historical point of view,<sup>\*</sup> there is no doubt that Epicureanism has been the victim of a substantial series of misunderstandings, which have led to its exclusion from all those ancient philosophical systems that, on the contrary, have been regarded as worthy of surviving, not only in Christian circles (where it is surprising that, in spite of everything, some theologians, for example at least in part Clement of Alexandria, actually respected Epicurean doctrine)<sup>1</sup> but already in pagan antiquity, beginning at least with the “bad publicity” inaugurated by Timocrates,<sup>2</sup> from right within the *Kepos*. If one wished to summarize the points that in every period served to malign the integrity of Epicurus’s philosophy, they could be reduced to four: (1) the doctrine of pleasure; (2) a non-scientific physical theory that, on the one hand, was like a “rough draft” of Democritean atomism, and, on the other hand, did not take account of Aristotle’s physics, which was surely an incomparable model from which to draw inspiration; (3) the mortality of

the soul; (4) a (scandalous) theology that turned the gods into essentially useless beings. As Christianity took root in the popular culture, Epicureanism was attacked and discredited above all for the last two points concerning the soul and the gods. One could offer many examples of this, but as far as the mortality of the soul is concerned, it suffices to mention that so highly cultivated and humanistic a pope as Enea Silvio Piccolomini (Pius II) began the preface to his learned *Commentarii* (composed between 1462 and 1463) precisely by attacking Epicurus: if the soul perishes at death, as Epicurus wrongly believed (*ut falso censuit Epicurus*), then fame cannot be of any benefit. As for the gods, another man of refined cultivation, Martin Luther, in one of his *Tischreden* (summer-autumn 1542),<sup>3</sup> asserted that in regard to theology Aristotle is no different from Epicurus (*Aristoteles est prorsus Epicurus*), given that both philosophers maintained that the divine was inactive in respect to human affairs. As a result, any sort of providence was utterly abolished.

The negation of providence (*pronoia*) and, accordingly, of fate (*heimarmenē*) entailed that Epicurus even came to be regarded as an atheist, above all by the Stoics. Toward the end of his tightly reasoned reply to the speech of the Epicurean Velleius, which concludes the first book of Cicero's *De natura deorum* (1.44.123 = Edelstein & Kidd 22a; see also the parallel testimony in Lactantius's *De ira dei* 4.7 = Edelstein & Kidd 22b), Cotta summarizes what Posidonius (significantly called *familiaris omnium nostrum*) expounded in a section of his treatise *On the Gods* (*Peri theōn*), the existence of which is confirmed by Diogenes Laertius as well (7.138; 148 = Edelstein & Kidd 20–21). According to Posidonius, Epicurus was an atheist because at bottom he did not believe in the existence of the gods; if Epicurus allowed that the gods existed, he did so solely for the sake of convenience, that is, to deflect hostility and in particular the accusation of atheism from himself. It is obvious that Posidonius's testimony is polemical and malicious in respect to Epicurus; but Posidonius expresses *in nuce* the basic features of Epicurus's bad reputation in matters of theology, which, as we have said, were to cast a long shadow well beyond the chronological limits of the ancient world. It is obviously impossible to determine whether Epicurus, the "coryphaeus of atheism," as Clement of Alexandria dubbed him (*Strom.* 1.1), was at heart an atheist; nevertheless, it is certain that, basing ourselves on what his texts say, Epicurus believed firmly and with conviction in the existence of the gods. In this connection, Cicero in the *De*

*natura deorum* (1.19.50) attributes to Epicurus, via his spokesman Velleius, the doctrine of *isonomia* which has an “application” precisely in the theological sphere. After having repeated that the infinite in Epicurus’s philosophical system is of huge importance, Velleius appeals to *isonomia*, a Greek term that in Latin is rendered by *aequabilis tributio*. *Isonomia* provides that, even in a situation in which atoms and the void are infinite, everything has some other thing that corresponds to it (*omnia omnibus paribus paria respondeant*); from this it follows that if mortals are very numerous, the immortals will be no less numerous, just as, if the causes of destruction are innumerable, so too the causes of preservation will be infinite. It is clear, then, that *isonomia* refers to a principle that essentially distributes all things in the infinite universe; this means, in the last analysis, that the infinite is not at all synonymous with chaos or disorder but rather, on the contrary, is sustained by a “law” (which, however, has nothing divine, providential, or teleological about it) which governs the whole in an orderly and distributive way.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, if we suppose that there is a close connection between the *ipsissima verba Epicuri* and what Epicurus himself actually believed, we should not and cannot maintain that he was an atheist.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, even recently, and in spite of progress in the study of Epicurean philosophy, Epicurus has still been stubbornly regarded as an atheist:<sup>6</sup> yet anyone who believes this has not taken Epicurus’s texts into consideration and refuses to recognize the decisive role that theology plays in Epicurus’s system. Those who think Epicurus was an atheist would do well to meditate carefully on a passage in Philodemus’s *De pietate*, where, making due allowance for its apologetic purpose, the philosopher from Gadara furnishes an important piece of information:

those who eliminate the divine from existing things (*tōn ontōn*) Epicurus reproached for their complete madness, as in Book 12 (sc. of *On Nature*) he reproaches Prodicus, Diagoras, and Critias among others, saying that they rave like lunatics, and he likens them to Bacchant revellers, admonishing them not to trouble or disturb us.<sup>7</sup>

In Book 12 of the *Peri physeōs*, which is unfortunately lost, Epicurus directly criticized the most famous atheists in the Greek philosophical and literary tradition (Prodicus, Diagoras, and Critias), and rebuked them because with these ideas they were causing riots and disturbances. The passage in Philodemus constitutes a further argument against the hypothesis

that the Epicurean gods were projections or mental constructs: it would be illogical and indeed inconsistent to treat the gods as thought constructs—a hypothesis dating back at least as far as Friedrich Albert Lange’s *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*—and at the same time reproach atheists for their denial of the real existence of divinities.

## (BASIC) TEXTUAL EVIDENCE ON EPICURUS’S THEOLOGY

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Epicurus’s theory, then, is *also* a theological theory (not different, *mutatis mutandis*, at least in part from Plato’s or Aristotle’s philosophy, or indeed from that of the Stoics), within a large-scale philosophical system in which the gods have a function that is not at all marginal. In this respect, the most important text is surely paragraphs 123–24 of the *Epistle to Menoeceus*, where the first argument that Epicurus takes up concerns precisely the existence of the gods:<sup>8</sup>

First of all, think of the divine as a living being (*zōion*), incorruptible and happy (*aphtharton kai makarion*), in accord with what the common notion of the divine (*hē koinē tou theou noēsis*) indicates, and do not attribute to it anything that is at odds with incorruptibility or inconsistent with blessedness; in this regard, think rather of all that is capable of preserving blessedness together with incorruptibility. For the gods exist (*theoi men gar eisin*): our knowledge of them is evident (*enargēs gar autōn estin hē gnōsis*); but they do not exist in the way in which the majority think of them, because they do not hold onto them in a way that is consistent with the notion we have of them. The impious person (*asebēs*), then, is not the one who rejects the gods of the many but rather the one who ascribes to the gods the opinions (*doxas*) of the many, since the judgments (*apophaseis*) of the many concerning the gods are not prolepses (*prolēpseis*) but rather false hypolepses (*hypolēpseis pseudeis*). From this derive both the greatest harms and the greatest benefits from the gods; for since they are in fact continually committed to their own virtues, they welcome those who are like them but regard as foreign everything that is not such.

In spite of its brevity, this passage is quite rich, in that it condenses the fundamental features of Epicurean theology. Epicurus mentions right away the three essential and ineliminable characteristics of the divine: that it is a *zōion*, and hence a living being; its incorruptibility (*aphtharsia*); and, finally, its blessedness (*makariotēs*). Incorruptibility must be understood entirely in materialist terms: the gods are atomic aggregates, albeit very

“special”: their atomic constitution is eternally harmonious and never admits of any kind of perturbation or disturbance to its atomic structure. This particular quality, which Cicero rightly calls the *quasi corpus* (cf. Cic. *ND* 1.25.71; also Philod. *De diis* fr. 6–9 Diels 1916–17) of the gods, is due to the fact that the atoms that constitute the gods are continually replenished, so that their individual bodies never suffer from a diminution of matter of the sort that would cause them to die; thus, the gods will never meet with corruption and hence the complete disintegration of their “body” (cf. *RS* 1 and Lucr. *DRN* 2.646–51). The gods are to all effects living beings which, in contrast to all other atomic aggregates, will never experience dissolution, thanks to the continual replenishment of the atomic material of which they are constituted, that is, due to the uninterrupted atomic “reparation” (*antanaplērōsis*)<sup>9</sup> that renders the gods incorruptible, to be sure, and also blessed, as we read in the first *Key Doctrine*:

I. A blessed and incorruptible being (*to makarion kai aphtharton*) does not itself experience trouble nor does it cause trouble (*pragmata*) to others; thus it is not subject either to anger or to benevolence (*oute orgais oute charisi*).<sup>10</sup> For such things are characteristic of a being that is weak (*asthenei*). [In other works he says that the gods are knowable only by means of reason (*logōi theōrētous*); some subsist as material individuals, whereas others do so by way of a likeness in shape, produced by the continual flux of similar simulacra so organized as to construct the same object; and they are anthropomorphic].

The gods appear to us without fluctuations or second thoughts as endowed with two characteristics that communicate their ontological essence and moral advantage as efficiently as possible: they are marked by an uninterrupted possession of *aphtharsia* and *makariotēs*, as we have seen. In light of such advantages, Epicurus can legitimately claim for his divinities a condition of inactivity or even “idleness,” a kind of *scholē* (or indeed *otium*) that even seems, in some sources, to shade over into the theoretical exercise of *logismos* (reasoning), going even further, perhaps, than what Aristotle attributed to his immobile Prime Mover.<sup>11</sup> The gods do not care at all about the affairs of the cosmos and still less are they interested in keeping up with the events pertaining to our mortal lives. For if they did so, they would inevitably be involved in an uninterrupted swarm of perturbations and disturbances and so would *ipso facto* lose that blessedness that, on the contrary, distinguishes them.

## *DIVINE ACTIVITY IN EPICURUS' SCIENCE OF NATURE?*

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The blessedness of the gods is intrinsically connected to their physical incorruptibility:<sup>12</sup> the gods' state of well-being is not "simply" *eudaimonia* but is rather *makariotēs*. In short, the gods are more than happy, they are blessed. Their blessedness is the direct consequence of their incorruptibility: since they possess an atomic structure that is continually regenerated and replenished by material present in the immense empty spaces between worlds, where the gods reside, their state cannot be other than blessed. To take just one example, for the gods the fear of death and corruptibility has no *raison d'être*: the difference with human beings lies precisely in this. Those, indeed, who pursue Epicurean philosophy in a practical way, that is, in their daily *bios*, do not fear death not because it does not exist (for human beings, as atomic aggregates, will be subject to corruption as a result of atomic disintegration) but because *for them* death is nothing, since death is a privation of sensation (cf. Epicur. *RS* 2 with *SV* 31 and Lucr. *DRN* 3.830 ff.). For the gods, on the contrary, death is precisely "nothing," in the strictly ontological sense: it simply does not exist, given that they are never liable to corruption. Furthermore, *Key Doctrine* 1 neatly condenses, in its brevity, the reasons why a divine living being experiences neither anger nor benevolence and neither suffers nor causes trouble: its condition is that of a blessed and incorruptible being to which neither anger nor *charis* (benevolence, gratitude, sense of indebtedness) pertains or can pertain, and for this reason is under no necessity to do anything (whether benevolent or malevolent) with respect to human beings or any other entity (including the cosmos).<sup>13</sup> As Cicero puts it, via his Epicurean spokesman Velleius in the first book of the *De natura deorum* (19.51), god does nothing (*nihil enim agit*) and is not involved in any activity (*nullis occupationibus est implicatus*) but basically enjoys his wisdom and virtue (*sua sapientia et virtute gaudet*), that is, he lives in a state of maximum and eternal pleasure, experiencing neither pain nor perturbation.

Epicurus himself was entirely clear about this in his *Epistle to Herodotus* 76–77:

And one must absolutely maintain, in respect to celestial bodies (*en tois meteōrois*), that movement, rotation, eclipses, rising, setting, and other similar phenomena occur, although there exists no one who is in charge, who arranges these events or has arranged them in an organized fashion, and who possesses at the same time total blessedness together with incorruptibility.

77. For activity and worries and rages and kindnesses are not suited to blessedness (*makariotēti*) but rather are generated in weakness (*en astheneiai*) and in fear and the need for neighbors—and not even (celestial bodies), which are at the same time a dense fire, possess blessedness and make these motions voluntarily; rather, one must preserve their full majesty (*pan to semnona*) in regard to all the terms that refer to such notions, so that opinions contrary to their majesty do not arise; if not, this very contradiction will cause the greatest perturbation (*ton megiston tarachon*) in one's soul.

Celestial phenomena and the very constitution of the cosmos are not caused by divine action and so are not in any way a manifestation of activity on the part of the gods with respect to humanity.<sup>14</sup> For it is not possible to conceive of a being that is blessed and incorruptible and which, at the same time, concerns itself with arranging this or that phenomenon or performing this or that activity. Epicurus is convinced that anger, kindness, activity, and worries pertain to a being that is weak and which, precisely on account of its weakness, is forever under necessity of doing something and communicating and satisfying its own needs: Epicurus's gods enjoy themselves, their state of maximum and eternal pleasure which is equivalent to full and complete blessedness. This is why they have no need of supplications, prayers, or sacrifices, which make sense only in a human kind of economic logic, which turns the relationship with the divine into something "commercializable" so as to obtain benefits. The same idea is expressed in a highly significant passage in the *Epistle to Pythocles* (97), the didactic letter dedicated to the study of celestial and meteorological phenomena (*ta meteōra*):

And the divine nature (*hē theia physis*) must not be invoked as a cause of such things, but must be kept absolutely apart from any sort of service (*aleitourgētos*) and in complete blessedness (*en tēi pasēi makariotēti*). Otherwise, every investigation into the causes (*aitiologia*) of celestial phenomena will be in vain, as has happened to some who, in their ignorance of the method of possible explanations, have descended into empty arguments, because they believed in a single method of explanation and therefore refuted all the others that are based on the criterion of possibility, and they turned to irrationality, since they did not know how even those phenomena that must be understood as clues should be regarded.

The passage in the *Epistle to Pythocles* is crucial, given that Epicurus clearly denies that celestial phenomena (and natural phenomena in general)



are caused by *theia physis*, that is, a divine nature which, since it has no occupation, does not bother to cause such events, from earthquakes to lightning bolts to eclipses, contrary to traditional views (see, e.g., Soph. *Oed. Col.* 1463–71). For phenomena of this type Epicurus introduces the method of multiple explanations or *pleonachos tropos*,<sup>15</sup> in accord with which, since there are materially multiple causes by which *ta meteōra* are produced, the explanations relative to any given phenomenon will be likewise multiple and the number of them will be limited only by their compatibility with perceivable self-evidence (*enargeia*).<sup>16</sup> In this way, Epicurus, on the one hand, takes his place in the tradition (in part Aristotelian or Peripatetic) that excludes the divine from nature and reduces everything that occurs in nature to basic principles or rather to atoms and void, while, on the other hand, he separates himself clearly from all those doctrines (going back certainly to Plato’s *Timaeus* and to which old Stoa was, *mutatis mutandis*, to be heir) by which the real world and its harmony are generated by divine activity.<sup>17</sup>

In Epicurus, then (basically as in Seneca’s *Naturales Quaestiones*, but with certain crucial differences associated above all with the wider “horizon of meaning” in which celestial phenomena and their investigation are inscribed: cf. Sen. *NQ* Preface 13–17), scientific explanation assumes an absolute primacy over mythic-religious discourse, and it is only the scientific kind that allows for a practical answer to the (false) fears deriving from the direct action of the gods, who are held responsible for earthquakes, lightning bolts, and thunder and who are able to act on human beings, terrifying them so as to communicate their wishes. None of this is to be found in the *Epistle to Pythocles*: hence its “enlightened” modernity.

## ***EPICURUS AGAINST RELIGIO***

One might think that a completely inactive god like the Epicurean would represent a kind of impoverishment of the very notion of divinity; yet, in reality, as one may see also in the few verses of the *Aetna* cited below (108), on careful consideration Epicurus ascribes the greatest honor to the divine sphere, which is why, in the passage from the *Epistle to Herodotus* discussed above (99), he hastens to preserve the full majesty (of the gods:

*pan to semnona*). Epicurus is perfectly aware that a being that is truly divine cannot perform any activity and on the contrary is not the cause either of good or of evil: in this way Epicurus is opposed not only to the idea (in some respects traditional) that god is responsible only for good things and not for evil (cf. the paradigmatic statement in Pl. *R.* 2.379c2–7), but also to the idea that it is just because they are not the source of good things for human beings that the gods do not concern themselves with human affairs (this is, for example, the position of Thrasy Machus: Diels-Kranz 1956 85 B 8 = Laks-Most 2016 VII 35 D17). If the divine did anything (whether benevolent or malevolent), it would be a weak being and so needing to perform activities for its own subsistence. For Epicurus, to assign complete inactivity to gods means to grant them an honor and majesty such as to make of divinity a being wholly “incommensurable” with any other real thing: this supremely elevated condition of god is reducible to those traits of blessedness and incorruptibility which make it a living ideal for human beings, a paradigm of absolute well-being to which we may continually aspire. Already in antiquity such a theology was thought to be an impoverishment of the very notion of the divine, above all in comparison with the *deus laboriosissimus* of the Stoics (cf. Cic. *ND* 1.20.52). Staying for a moment with *De natura deorum* (1.43.121), Cotta, in his reply to the Epicurean Velleius, accuses Epicurus of having radically abolished *religio* (that is, compunction and “religious” fear, or in a word, “superstition,” which is not to be confused with *eusebeia*, which corresponds to the Latin *pietas*)<sup>18</sup> from human minds, insofar as he deprived the gods of any possibility of aid or benevolence (*opem et gratiam*). Clearly, Epicurus could not agree with the accusation lodged by Cotta, but on the contrary would not only object that he had clearly written a work *On the Gods* (*Peri theōn*) and another *On Holiness* (*Peri hosiotētos*: cf. DL 10.27, and also Cic. *ND* 1.41.115), but also that, rather than impoverish the divine, he had so exalted it as to free it of any activity that would have downgraded it to the level of a being so weak as not to have any truly divine quality at all. Epicurus feared traditional religions, which he regarded as essentially a kind of superstition that blocks the way toward the achievement of imperturbability. This is clearest of all in Lucretius, who celebrates Epicurus as that *Graius homo* (*DRN* 1.66), who for the first time dared to raise his eyes against that oppressive *religio* which, as in the case of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, was the cause of wicked and impious acts.

According to Lucretius (this is in fact a veritable *Leitmotiv* in the *De rerum natura*), Epicurus's message overturned the foundations of *religio* so as to lay down the bases for a true and authentic *eusebeia* or *pietas*, inherently grounded in a divinity that is deprived of the common attributes of the divine but absolutely secure in its blessed condition. Hence the accusations of *asebeia* against Epicurus, who deprived the divine being of those traits that were no doubt fundamental and ineliminable for other, rival currents of thought (as they were as well, of course, for the common people, the *polloi*), designed to produce only, as Cicero's Velleius emphatically underlines, *portenta et miracula non disserentium philosophorum sed somniantium* (Cic. *ND* 1.8.8 = Usener 367) and so give rise to beliefs about the gods that were certainly vain and to theological statements (*apophaseis*) that were dangerous or unacceptable precisely because they were not grounded in the correct epistemological criterion of *prolepsis*.

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE GODS

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The passage in the *Epistle to Menoeceus* cited above constitutes a fundamental proof that Epicurus recognized the material existence of the gods; he is particularly explicit on this point: "for the gods exist." There is no denying that the verb has an existential sense in this case: the gods are real, material, existing beings. According to Epicurus, there are gods and they exist and form part of the materially constituted locus of all things. We can be conscious of them, not directly through the senses, but rather by means of an organ (equally "physical") like the mind or reason (*dianoia*, *mens/logos*, *logismos*).<sup>19</sup> The mind is struck, *physically struck*, by simulacra—when awake, but above all when asleep—that emanate, as Augustine makes clear, from *solidis corporibus* (*Ad Diosc. epist.* 118.27 = Usener 352) or, still better, in the words of Lucretius (5.76), *de corpore . . . sancto* of the gods. As Lucretius reaffirms, such a physical divine body is certainly not to be assimilated to a "normal" aggregate (*steremnion*), of which we have perceptual experience regularly through our senses; this particular divine bodylike aggregate, such as the images that come from it, is however anthropomorphic in appearance, and it is constituted of atoms that are altogether special, incredibly tiny and fine, so as to have a form that is, in

the words of Cicero's Velleius, *quasi corpus / quasi sanguis* (this could be a reference also to the divine *ichor* which according to the Homeric tradition was the fluid corresponding to the immortal blood of the gods; see e.g. Hom. *Il.* 5.339–40: ῥέε δ' ἄμβροτον αἶμα θεοῖο / ἰχῶρ, οἷός περ τε ῥέει μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν· [emphasis our own]). This is not a matter of projections<sup>20</sup> or, still less, of thought constructs assembled and created by human beings, as some scholars have maintained.<sup>21</sup> The existence of the gods is not simply a postulate but a view—like all those defended by Epicurus—that is supported and borne out by appeal to the self-evidence of sensation (*enargeia*). Epicurus, indeed, having declared that the gods exist, adds significantly that knowledge (*gnōsis*) of them is self-evident (*enargēs*). The adjective employed by Epicurus, that is, *enargēs*, must refer to *enargeia*, the self-evidence of the senses that is the authentic “litmus test” required to discern the truth or falseness of every judgment and belief. What is self-evident (*enargēs*) does not require any demonstration, exactly as in the case of sensation (*aisthēsis*) and the other epistemological yardsticks: the senses and the other criteria, indeed, are always clear and true and it is not possible to adduce proofs or demonstrations of them.<sup>22</sup> The evidence of each criterion coincides perfectly with its own epistemic status: for each criterion is true because it is (self-)evident and its “truth” cannot be confirmed by any other criterion; on the contrary, exactly those criteria are the yardsticks that assess the truth and falseness of beliefs. Just as sensation is always true<sup>23</sup> because it registers the fact that some external thing exists which bumps against the sense organs of the perceiver by means of *eidola* or simulacra, so too knowledge of the gods is evident and thus true and does need to be further proved or demonstrated. Epicurus does not go more deeply into the question, explaining in detail how the mechanism of knowledge of the gods occurs (this would most likely have been out of place in the context of a brief compendium like the *Epistle to Menoeceus*), but limits himself to associating the evidence or manifestness of our knowledge of the gods with our prolepses of them. Briefly, *prolepsis* is the criterion that allows one to grasp, that is, to understand, something even in the absence of direct sensation; this is the reason why a *prolepsis* necessarily makes use of memory, for memory recalls the many perceptions of a single body that have been repeatedly presented to us from without. Sensation is not in a position to recall (for it is *alogos*: cf. DL 10.31),

whereas a *prolepsis* can do so, uniting all the features that are necessarily required to grasp or understand a given object of which we have had repeated perceptions. The example recorded by Diogenes (10.33) is clear: it is solely thanks to a *prolepsis* that we can say that that thing, which is shaped in a determinate way, is a human being (*toiouton estin anthrōpos*). Evidently, to do this, we have several times over had a perception of a human being; these repeated perceptions (or rather the simulacra or *eidola* that continually strike against our sense organs) form a *typos*, that is a stamp or impression (in a purely physical sense),<sup>24</sup> on the mind or *dianoia*. A *prolepsis* is not a memory of all the data received by sensation but only of those that are actually relevant and necessary for (pre)understanding and recognition (in the absence of direct and immediate sensation) of the given object. For instance: we have had perceptions of many different human beings but no perception which has ever communicated the existence of a feathered human being or one with three arms. Diogenes adds to this statement that, in the very moment in which the word “human being” (*anthrōpos*) is uttered (*hama [...] rethēnai*), one thinks at once, thanks to *prolepsis*, of its *typos* that has been acquired by virtue of previously repeated perceptions. The crucial point, then, is that a *prolepsis* is closely connected to language; the term that is uttered, in this case “human being,” immediately recalls those ineliminable features thanks to which it is possible to recognize and understand in advance that one is dealing with a human being. This is why a *prolepsis* is a *katalepsis* (comprehension) or a concept (*ennoia*); every word or name (*onoma*) possesses something that, according to the expression used by Diogenes Laertius (10.33), primarily underlies it or, literally, is in the first instance “set beneath” it (*to prōtōs hypotetagmenon*; see too *Ep. Hdt.* 37), and this something is self-evident (*enargēs*). This is valid also in the case of the gods.

Impiety does not consist in denying the existence of the gods worshipped by the many (that would be pure atheism!) or in doubting that they exist (the agnostic position of a Protagoras: Diels-Kranz 1956 80 B 4 = Laks-Most 2016 VIII 31 D10), but in attributing to them the qualities and beliefs (those of the many) that find nothing that corresponds to them in the *prolepsis* (which is always true, since it is a criterion of truth) of the gods. The *prolepsis* of a divine being contains those traits that are absolutely inseparable from the divine (as Epicurus conceived it), that is, incorruptibility and blessedness; the *prolepsis* is constituted empirically,

that is, as the result of repeated perceptions of a specific object that are received by the subject and then are worked up by acts of *logismos*. Basically, it is the simulacra of the gods, which the mind (which is treated as a sense organ) receives (and works up) while one is awake but above all during sleep, that transmit the traits specific to divine beings; in this way a *prolepsis* of the gods is formed.<sup>25</sup> As soon as one does not take account of the *prolepsis* but attributes to a divine being activity, anger, worries, joys, and pains (as was the case with the gods in the Homeric tradition), one is committing an error in the first instance of an epistemological nature, the (frightening) consequences of which (that is, the occurrence of perturbation and fear) are inevitably ethical. The traits that are ascribed to the gods by the many are in fact false *hypolepseis*, the falseness of which is deduced by comparison with the *prolepsis*, which contains the authentic characteristics of the divine nature. For a belief will be true if and only if its content, once it is verified, corresponds properly to the phenomenon that the belief is about. It is no accident that belief (*doxa*) is defined by the Epicureans also by way of the term *hypolepsis*, whose meaning is, in some ways, the opposite of *prolepsis*; for a *prolepsis* is always true (it is a criterion of truth), whereas a “hypolepsis” or “supposition” can be either true or false (this is why Epicurus, in the passage in the *Epistle to Menoeceus*, hastens to add *pseudeis* to *hypolepseis*). To confirm that a *hypolepsis* is true or false requires the self-evidence of perception (*enargeia*). Recourse to the phenomena, however, can be either “direct” or “indirect” (cf. DL 10.34): a belief is true when it is directly confirmed (*epimartyrēsis*) and not indirectly disconfirmed (*ouk antimartyrēsis*) on the basis of the evidence of perception, whereas it is false when it is directly disconfirmed (*antimartyrēsis*) and indirectly not confirmed (*ouk epimartyrēsis*), once more on the basis of the evidence of perception. In the case of the gods, to ascribe work or passions to the divine means to have a false belief concerning it, a *hypolepsis* that is disconfirmed and not confirmed precisely by perceptible evidence, that is, in the last analysis, by those simulacra that are continually detaching themselves from the *quasi corpora* of the gods and communicating to the subject that perceives them that the gods are essentially incorruptible and blessed: incorruptibility and blessedness are the essential characteristics of divinity and, therefore, constitute the *prolepsis* of it. A god that does not have those characteristics, in the eyes of Epicurus, is simply not a god.



## DIVINE ANTHROPOMORPHISM

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Since there does not exist a form more beautiful than that of the human being, the gods cannot be other than anthropomorphic;<sup>26</sup> precisely the shape of the gods is discussed in an important theological treatise, perhaps attributable to Demetrius Lacon and preserved in *P.Herc.* 1055<sup>27</sup> which, alongside the works *De diis* and *De pietate* by Philodemus of Gadara, represents one of the most significant texts for the investigation of Epicurean theology. This work confirms how relevant the questions were concerning the shape of divine beings and the way in which we know them, above all by way of polemics against other currents of thought. A non-negligible proof of the importance of the treatise contained in *P.Herc.* 1055 is the fact that it preserves an innovative argument relating to the anthropomorphism of the gods, which makes use of a typically Epicurean process of inference, investigated by Philodemus in his *De signis* (*P.Herc.* 1065).<sup>28</sup> Demetrius specifies that the ascription to the gods of an anthropological form depends on *epispasmoi* or, as it is usually translated, “inferential impulses” (coll. XIV 6; Santoro XVI 2). These impulses of inferential reasoning by analogy induce us to believe that, if a god is a living being, we cannot help but endow it with reason; given that man is the only living being that possesses a rational faculty, it is clear that god cannot but have a human form.<sup>29</sup> Two other important characteristics are connected to anthropomorphism: the gods breathe and converse (in Greek or in a language not very different from Greek) among themselves. Philodemus in the third book of the *De diis*<sup>30</sup> attributes this position to Hermarchus, the first scholarch of the *Kepos* in Athens after the death of Epicurus (271/270 BCE). The fact that the gods inhale and exhale is directly connected to their voice and, hence, to their ability to speak. Naturally, the mutual conversation that Hermarchus attributes to the gods is not without problems: for why should the gods have to talk among themselves if they are free of worries? To obviate this difficulty one can plausibly suppose that divine conversations are not conducted with a view to communicating a need; as Philodemus writes, basing himself on Hermarchus, conversing with those who are like oneself is a source of indescribable pleasure, all the more so if it involves incorruptible and blessed creatures. Thus, if the gods



were similar to living beings who were completely mute, they would not be living a life that is truly blessed. One may, therefore, suppose that their dialogues continually praise and affirm their condition of uninterrupted blessedness, among other things in the only language of the wise, that is, Greek (or a language quite similar to Greek).

## ***EPICURUS'S REJECTION OF ASTRAL THEOLOGY***

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The sources, as we have observed, are pretty much in agreement in testifying that the gods are known by the mind, or more precisely, by reason.<sup>31</sup> The expression most commonly employed in these sources to indicate how the gods can be known is *logoi theōrētoi*: the gods are observable or knowable by means of reason.<sup>32</sup> The question concerning the meaning of this expression has been much debated by scholars. Epicurus's use of the verb *theōrein* in no way points to an intelligible realm that has nothing to do with the sensible, but refers essentially to the (perceptual) activity of observing, seeing, or contemplating. The addition of the dative *logōi* specifies the activity involved in *theōrein*: the gods are observable thanks to reason, but this does not mean that they are not really existing living beings and actually endowed with a (*quasi*) physical body made up of atoms. Clearly, the fact that the (*quasi*) body of the gods cannot be perceived by the senses is the reason why Epicurus explains in what way they are *logoi theōrētoi*: the simulacra that detach themselves from the gods and which must complete an extremely long trajectory (given that the Olympus of the Epicurean gods is the *intermundia* or *metakosmia*,<sup>33</sup> that is, the wide spaces that are interposed between one cosmos and the next, and where the deities can live undisturbed even by bumps and collisions; cf. *Ep. Pyth.* 89, as well as 'Hipp.' *Ref.* 1.22.3 = Usener 359) are so fine as to be imperceptible to the senses and exclusively perceptible to the *mens* or *dianoia*.<sup>34</sup> The mind is a sensory organ to all intents and purposes but of course endowed with specific activities of its own: for the gods cannot be perceived with the sensory organs of the body (such as the eyes or ears) but only by the mind, which, after it has received the divine simulacra, perceives them and works on them. The perception of the *eidola* of the gods proves their existence, while further work on this perceptual material leads

directly to the formation of the *prolepsis* of the gods that is able to disconfirm any false belief that would make of the gods irascible or active beings (whether for good or evil) in regard to human beings and, more generally, to nature. Here lies the principal reason, among other things, for Epicurus's fierce criticism of so-called astral theology:<sup>35</sup> in paragraphs 73–74 of the *Epistle to Herodotus*, Epicurus again takes up the theme of cosmology, specifying that worlds, like all atomic aggregates, will dissolve in turn, some faster (no doubt insofar as their structure is not tightly knit), others more slowly; this is directly tied to Epicurus's denial that worlds can be animate beings (*zōia*). This is a powerful move away from Plato's *Timaeus* and all those cosmologies (including traditionally religious ones) that not only regard celestial bodies as divinities (precisely this is the basis of the astral theology specifically refuted by the Epicureans),<sup>36</sup> but hold that the cosmos is endowed with a world soul that performs the task of animating it (see Pl. *Tim.* 34b–37c). Epicurus, on the one hand, denies that, as in the case of the *Timaeus*, there is a divine artisan (for Epicurus, to return to an important fragment of Diogenes of Oenoanda, the only artisan is nature itself),<sup>37</sup> a demiurge that fashions the world with a providential purpose at a specific point in time and in the best possible way, in the image and similitude of an eternal, perfect, and living paradigm, given the inherent inactivity of the Epicurean gods<sup>38</sup> and the eternity of the universe; and, on the other hand, Epicurus refutes the idea that worlds are animated living beings. Besides, the gods cannot be identified with the planets because the perpetual movement of celestial bodies, however harmonious it might be, does not conform to the perennial bliss in which the gods live in all its fullness.<sup>39</sup> Those who maintain that the stars (for example, the sun and moon) are divine beings are simply mistaken (like the Stoics: see, for instance, Plutarch *De Stoic. rep.* 1051F = SVF 2.1049), given that they do not take into account the fact that the gods are different from celestial bodies because the images of the former, in their continual movement from their starting point in the *intermundia*, are merely reflected by the latter. Human beings, who do not understand that it is really only a matter of reflection, identify the gods with the stars, since the reflection brings it about that the gods seem to be at exactly the same distance as the planets (hence the mistake of identifying the two), just as an object (perhaps bigger and further away) that is reflected in a mirror seems to be at the same

distance as the mirror.<sup>40</sup> In short, worlds have nothing divine about them but are simply atomic aggregates that are generated and destroyed for reasons strictly tied to the physics and kinetics of atoms.

To understand the special character of the Epicurean position, and keeping to the Hellenistic world, one need only think of the *Phenomena* of Aratus of Soli (translated by Cicero himself in his *Aratea*),<sup>41</sup> which begins with a true and proper hymn to Zeus (vv. 1–25), who is present in every place and every thing and by his activity regulates the life of mankind in an orderly way, thanks to the constellations that he placed in the sky. The same position will be taken up in the *Astronomica* of Manilius, who begins his work by declaring that the cosmos is wholly governed by an *aeterna ratio* (64) that harmoniously manages the movements of all things. In Aratus and in Manilius (by virtue of their more or less self-conscious attachment to the Stoic school of thought) we may see exactly what Epicurus was criticizing. Leaving aside Lucretius, there are clear echoes of this position in a text included in the *Appendix Vergiliana*, the *Aetna*, which has been justly called a “scientific poem,”<sup>42</sup> in which the anonymous author engages in a polemic against all of the typically mythic-poetic views that treat phenomena associated with volcanic activity as resulting from some divinity. But, as he says, the gods “do not have . . . such vulgar occupations, nor is it proper to drag heavenly beings down to the most humble activities: these sublime beings reign in a heaven that is hidden from us, and they are not concerned to undertake the labor of artisans” (32–35).<sup>43</sup>

## ***EPICURUS’S REBUTTAL OF PROVIDENCE***

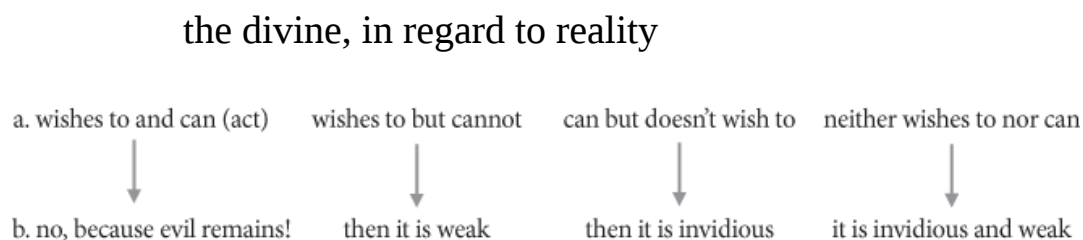
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Now that we have analyzed the basic features of the Epicurean conception of the divine, we must, finally, raise the question of the true inner meaning of theology in Epicurus’s philosophical system. The crucial point, all in all, is to understand what sense there was in venerating the gods—as Epicurus did, after all, and invited others to do as well<sup>44</sup>—if the gods did not bestir themselves either for good or evil and, as a result, there could not be any kind of providence (*apronoēsia*), which, if we go by the testimony of Origen (*Cels.* 1.13 = Usener 369),<sup>45</sup> the Epicureans did not hesitate to deem a form of *deisidaimonia*, that is, fear of the gods, or superstition.

The Epicurean critique of every kind of providence is attested in various sources, in both their historical practice and their philosophical position. To understand its merit and the form of the arguments, it may be useful to go over what Sextus Empiricus writes in *PH* 3.9–12. Here, he seems (tacitly, it is true, but almost certainly, as we can determine thanks to a comparison with a parallel passage in Lactantius)<sup>46</sup> to make use of Epicurus’s doctrine, which, as we have seen, regards divinity not only as an incorruptible and immortal being but above all one whose blessedness is directly proportional to its lack of interest in the affairs of our world and thus is far removed from any kind of providential care or concern. Thanks to a kind of disguised *ad hominem* exploitation of Epicurean polemics (probably chiefly anti-Stoic), Sextus constructs a tight and at the same time ironic anti-theodicy, and it is perhaps worth the effort to run through at least its basic features.<sup>47</sup>

Whoever accepts divine *pronoia* must face a harsh choice. A divinity exercises its providential power—and with good intentions, we may add—either (I) over all things, or (II) only over some.

- (I) The first branch, however, is blocked by a very powerful factual counter-example (*P.* 3.9): the existence of evil in the world, which is acknowledged, after all, by the very same supporters of a providential order of the real world.
- (II) The analysis of the second alternative (*PH* 3.10–11), which calls into question the restricted range of providential action, gives rise to a quadrilemma,<sup>48</sup> the horns of which and their respective refutations may for the sake of convenience be represented schematically as follows:



All the conclusions indicated in section (b) of the diagram are incompatible with a truly pious view of divinity, as is reaffirmed in *PH* 3.12, again thanks

to the use of a verbal expression (*epilogizometha*) that is plausibly of Epicurean ancestry.

We can take as established, then, both the intense critique of the providential order of the universe and the exhortation to revere the traditional gods (but stripped of their “Homeric attributes”).

## *EPICUREAN PRIESTS*

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Given this picture, and in view of the latter position in particular, it will come as no surprise that there are attested (especially through epigraphy) Epicureans in priestly offices. We limit ourselves to noting: (1) Tiberius Claudius Lepidus (second century CE), an important representative of the Epicurean community in Amastris, a coastal city in Paphlagonia, who was priest and head of the College of Augustales in charge of the imperial cult (see the testimony of Lucian of Samosata in his *Alexander or the False Prophet*, 25); and (2) Aurelius Belius Philippus, who in an inscription (dated to the time of Hadrian or a little later) appears as “priest (*hiereus*) and diadochus of the Epicureans in Apamea.”<sup>49</sup>

As one may readily imagine, the question is as delicate as it is controversial, and hence widely debated. One plausible answer—which takes account, on the one hand, of the blessed and incorruptible life that is led by the gods and, on the other hand, of the Epicurean rejection of any divine activity and, connected to this, their denial of providence and of prophecy—may be found in the idea that the gods are models or regulative ideals to which all people (but especially the *sophoi*, the wise “friends of the gods”: see the third passage of Philodemus, gathered under Usener 386) should (or at least try to) conform.<sup>50</sup> Maintaining that the gods are models does not at all mean diminishing the role that they play, especially if we bear in mind that “conforming” in this world and to the extent possible to the blessed and perfect life of the gods is not an “ideal” undertaking, lacking any relation to reality. The conclusion to the *Epistle to Menoeceus* (135) invites the addressee (who is simultaneously individual and general)<sup>51</sup> to meditate on the central ethical issues in the letter; in this way it will be possible to avoid perturbation and to live like a god among men (*hōs theos en anthrōpois*),<sup>52</sup> and thus to achieve in practice the highest realization of

happiness (*eudaimonia*). We find the same idea expressed in the *Epistle to Menoeceus* also in Lucretius, where he affirms that it is not impossible, here and now, to lead a life like that of the gods (Lucr. *DRN* 3.322: *dignam dis degere vitam*). The expression employed by Epicurus in the letter is quite strong and, if Epicurean theology has any meaning at all, it should be found just here in the conclusion to the *Epistle to Menoeceus*: to live like a god among men means to envision divinity not as something distant (although it is so, in fact, from a strictly physical and local point of view) and so insignificant, but rather as representing a practical possibility of realizing here and now the ideal of life proposed by Epicurus and of attaining happiness in a lasting way, enjoying in this life (the only one we have) pleasure (understood as the absence of pain: cf. *Ep. Men.* 131). Thus, the role played by the gods cannot be other than ethical, and it is significant that Epicurus very likely again justified this “function” in physical terms.

## THE ETHICAL MEANING OF EPICUREAN THEOLOGY

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As has been observed, it is undeniable that *eidola* detach themselves from the gods; as Cicero writes (*ND* 1.19.49), the mind turns to these *cum maximis voluptatibus*, with the greatest pleasure (this Ciceronian passage, incidentally, can be read in connection with what Polyaeus maintains in regard to the relationship between the divine nature and pleasure, as we shall see in a moment). Moreover, at the beginning of the sixth book of the *De rerum natura*, Lucretius writes that, if conceptions unworthy of the gods are not refuted (6.75–78):

you will not approach the temples of the gods with a tranquil heart / nor will you be able to receive with serene peace of mind / the simulacra that flow from their holy bodies (*de corpore . . . sancto simulacra feruntur*) / to the minds of human beings, as messengers of the divine form (*in mentes hominum divinae nuntia formae*).

Alongside the passages from Cicero and Lucretius, we may add an important text of the middle Platonic philosopher Atticus, recorded by Eusebius of Caesarea (des Places fr. 3 p. 48.63–65, *ap. Eus. PE* 15.5.7 = Usener 385), who deemed the absence of providence in Aristotle more

impious than the same doctrine in Epicurus. In this passage, Atticus writes that, according to Epicurus, human beings derive a benefit (*onēsis*) from the gods: their better emanations (*beltionas aporrhōias*) are accessory causes (or “co-causes”: *paraitias*) of many good things for those who partake of them. Atticus is right not to attribute to the Epicurean gods any “pure” or “absolute” causality—that would result in a patent contradiction with Epicurus’s philosophy—but to speak more modestly of “co-causes” or *paraitiai*,<sup>53</sup> although in the Epicurean tradition itself there are not lacking those who regarded the divine nature as a cause. This is the case with the Epicurean Polyaenus (Tepedino Guerra fr. 29) who, in the first book of his *On Philosophy* (*Peri philosophias*), maintained, according to what Philodemus reports in the *De pietate*, that the divine nature (*theia physis*) is the perfect cause (*autotelousan . . . aitian*) for us (*hēmin*) of the greatest pleasures (*hēdonōn tōn megistōn*). In any case, Atticus reports that the better emanations of the gods (the reference is, of course, to the divine simulacra) are able to provide a benefit, that is, a profit directly bound up with that imperturbability that the gods enjoy eternally and which, for those who adopt the philosophy of Epicurus, is an actual and real possibility that they are called upon to realize in practice, if they wish to achieve a truly genuine and lasting happiness. On the basis of Atticus’s testimony and the other parallel sources, the veneration of the gods acquires an ethical value of the highest order, even as it coexists with the inactivity of the divine and the absence of providence. The simulacra of the gods, then, bring benefits, and thus to participate in prayers and in religious ceremonies (cf. Diog. Oen. fr. 19 II 6–11 Smith) means to “interiorize” in an effective way the (pleasurable) divine simulacra and to put into practice the commitment to become like a god among men.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, the gods are not only ethical models and regulative ideals, introduced by Epicurus solely in order to render his philosophical system consistent with his recognition of beings that are eternally and genuinely imperturbable. Epicurus’s gods also become figures highly relevant to our ethical life, playing a role that is at least indirectly active (although without any deliberate intention on their part), in virtue of the benefits that their simulacra bring us in practice on the not always easy road toward assimilation to god (*homoiōsis theōi*), which has a Platonic pedigree (cf. *Theaet.* 176a–b) but is totally of this world and bounded by the limits of this life.<sup>55</sup> This is why, in Epicurus’s philosophy, veneration (*sebasmos*) of the gods is often confused with veneration of the



Epicurean sages (at the head of the list are the *kathēgēmones* or *andres* of the *Kepos*: Epicurus, Metrodorus, Polyaenus, and Hermarchus), as happens, for example, in the anonymous treatise on ethical matters contained in *P.Herc.* 346.<sup>56</sup> It is no accident that in the *De rerum natura* Lucretius ascribes to Epicurus divine attributes (cf., e.g., *DRN* 3.15: *divina mente*; 5.8: *deus ille fuit, deus*; 5.50–51: *nonne decebit / hunc hominem numero divum dignarier esse?*) to convey the idea that Epicurus (and more generally the Epicurean sage) should be an object of veneration, rather than the false gods of *religio*. As we read in *SV* 32, “Veneration of a sage is a great good for those who venerate him.” For the Epicurean sage is in all respects a god among men, and the control of the passions and, more specifically, the elimination of false opinions (*kenodoxia*) depends also on glorification of the *sophos* and, more generally, on the imitation of Epicurus, as Lucretius himself, after all, confirms in the opening to Book 2 of the *De rerum natura* (5–6), where he declares that he desires to imitate Epicurus out of love (*propter amorem / quod te imitari aveo*), completely in line with the most authentic and orthodox doctrine and tradition of the *Kepos*. The veneration of the sage, like assimilation to a god, is a good for whoever practices this activity: in the former case, sages are concrete models, living paradigms toward which we must orient our existence, whereas in the case of the gods, their beneficent simulacra (which one can “attract” by means of prayer) are an aid to us because they give us pleasure and teach us that *ataraxia* is a possible and desirable condition, and choiceworthy beyond anything else. This, obviously, does not mean that the gods are “active” or “principal causes” of our happiness: for Epicurus, happiness can only derive from *all*<sup>57</sup> human beings themselves and not from outside; and yet, the achievement of happiness, the privileged goal of philosophy, depends *also* on the veneration of living beings, incorruptible and blessed, who do not act either for good or for ill in relation to those who do, nevertheless, pray to them.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Schmid, *Epicuro e l'epicureismo cristiano*, 179–97 (Schmid, “Epikur,” 803–16), and the interesting evidence of Augustine (*Conf.* 6.16 = Usener 407). This section was written by Francesco Verde.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sedley, “Epicurus and His Professional Rivals,” 127–32.

<sup>3</sup> WA TR 5. Nr. 5440.

<sup>4</sup> On *isonomia*, cf. Giussani, *Studi lucreziani*, 227–65; Tescari, “ANTANAIAPHΩΣΙΣ Dei e ΙΣΟΝΟΜΙΑ in Epicuro”; Isnardi Parente, “La isonomia epicurea”; Kleve, “The Epicurean Isonomia”; and Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, 155–66.

<sup>5</sup> In this connection, cf. Giannantoni, “Epicuro e l'ateismo antico”.

<sup>6</sup> A view not dissimilar to that of Clement of Alexandria has been embraced by Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) who, in the essay that opens his *Jesus von Nazareth* makes Epicurus the father of atheism (cf. Ratzinger, “Da Auschwitz alle baraccopoli”). *Contra* see now the overview offered by T. Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods*, part 3, ch. 12. On Epicurus's atheism see too the interesting (and rather malevolent) testimony of Aelian (*Suda* ε 2405 = fr. 39 Hercher = fr. 42a Domingo-Forasté = Usener part. 218; for the controversial testimony on the plague caused by Philodemus's alleged “atheism” at Himera, see *Suda* τ 634 = fr. 40 Hercher = fr. 43b Domingo-Forasté = T8 Sider).

<sup>7</sup> Col. XVIII 518–33 Obbink *Philodemus: On Piety, Part I*; trans. Obbink. For more on Epicurean theology see the detailed monograph by Piergiacomini, *Storia delle antiche teologie atomiste* (along with the review by Santoro) and Erler, *Epicurus: An Introduction to His Practical Ethics and Politics*, ch. 4.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed commentary on the passage, cf. Heßler, *Epikur: Brief an Menoikeus*, 163–94. This section was written by Emidio Spinelli.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Epicurus *Ep. Hdt.* 48.

<sup>10</sup> On this point see the concise but reliable summary by Lactantius *De ira dei* 4.1 = Usener 365.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Merlan, “Aristoteles' und Epikurs müssige Götter.” More in general about the relationship between Epicurus, the Epicureans, and Aristotle's philosophy, cf. Verde, “Aristotle and the Garden.”

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Verde, “Οὐδὲν διφυῆς αἰσθητόν”. This section was written by Emidio Spinelli.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Warren, “Removing Fear,” 238–42.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Verde, “Alexis' *The Achaean Woman*”.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Bénatouil, “La méthode épicurienne des explications multiples”; Bakker, *Epicurean Meteorology: Sources, Method, Scope and Organization*, 8–75; Hankinson, “Lucretius, Epicurus, and the Logic of Multiple Explanations”; Verde, “Cause epicuree”; Masi, “The Method of Multiple Explanations”; Verde, “Posidonius against Epicurus' Method of Multiple Explanations?”; Verde, “L'empirismo di Teofrasto e la meteorologia epicurea”; and Verde, “Epicurean Meteorology, Lucretius, and the *Aetna*”.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ierodiakonou, “The Notion of *Enargeia* in Hellenistic Philosophy.”

<sup>17</sup> See Erler, “Epikur-Die Schule Epikurs-Lukrez,” 144–45 and 149–53; and Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, 139–55.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Schmid, *Epicuro e l'epicureismo cristiano*, 121–22 (Schmid, “Epikur,” 761–62); and Olivetti, “Filosofia della religione,” 143–45. This section was written by Emidio Spinelli.

<sup>19</sup> On the manner in which the gods are known, cf. Kleve, *Gnosis Theon*; and Lemke, *Die Theologie Epikurs*. This section was written by Emidio Spinelli.

<sup>20</sup> See in this connection the sound objections advanced by Kany-Turpin, “Les dieux,” 162.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. in support of this view Sedley, “Epicurus' Theological Innatism.” (Cf., among others, also Obbink, “‘All Gods are True’ in Epicurus”); for a different (and more convincing) position, we may cite Konstan, “Epicurus on the Gods.” For further insights, cf. also Santoro, [*Demetrio Lacone*]: [*La forma del dio*], 60–65; Purinton, “Epicurus on the Nature of the Gods”; Wifstrand Schiebe, “Sind die

epikureischen Götter ‘Thought-Constructs’?”; Babut, “Sur les dieux d’Épicure”; Essler, *Glücklich und unsterblich*, 344–53; and Spinelli, “Senza teodicea,” 215–16 nn. 10 and 12.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Morel, “Esperienza e dimostrazione in Epicuro.”

<sup>23</sup> Cf. most recently Hahmann, “Epikur über den Gegenstand der Wahrnehmung”, “Epicurus on Truth and *Phantasia*,” and Verde, “Ancora sullo statuto veritativo della sensazione in Epicuro”.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Long, “*Aisthesis*, *Prolepsis* and Linguistic Theory in Epicurus,” 120; on the connection between sensation, memory, and *typos* see, (already) Pl. *Theaet.* 192a 4; 194b 5 and Aristot. *De mem.* 1.450a29–34, along with Masi, “Gli atomi ricordano?”; and Spinelli, “*Physiologia medicans*: The Epicurean Road to Happiness”.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Lucr. *DRN* 5.1171; see also Sext. *Emp. M* 9.25 = Usener 353 and, in particular, the very dense summary by Cicero in *ND* 1.16.43–20.56 = Usener 352.

<sup>26</sup> See the scholium to *RS* 1, cited above (on this scholium, cf. at least Isnardi Parente, “Gli dei di Epicuro”) and also Cic. *ND* 1.18.46 and Aët. 1.7.34, Diels, *Doxographi Graeci*, 306 = Usener 355. This section was written by Francesco Verde.

<sup>27</sup> Ed. Santoro [*Demetrio Lacone*]: [*La forma del dio*].

<sup>28</sup> Ed. De Lacy and De Lacy, *Philodemus: On Methods of Inference*.

<sup>29</sup> On the meaning of *epispasmos*, see Santoro, [*Demetrio Lacone*]: [*La forma del dio*], 143–44, along with Koch, *Comment peut-on être dieu?*, 113–15; and now Piergiacomini, “Mental Attraction to a Magnet-Like God.”

<sup>30</sup> *P.Herc.* 152/157, coll. XIII 20–XIV 13, Diels 1916–17 p. 36 f. = Longo Auricchio, *Ermarco: Frammenti*, 32; cf. also Cic. *ND* 1.33.92–93 = Longo Auricchio, *Ermarco: Frammenti*, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Essler, *Glücklich und unsterblich*, chh. 1 and 3. This section was written by Francesco Verde.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. again the scholium to *RS* I and Aët. 1.7.34, Diels, *Doxographi Graeci*, 306 = Usener 355; see also Cic. *ND* 1.18.49 and 37.105 (in the latter Cicero, via Cotta, argues that the *species dei* is perceived *cogitatione*). Note too the occurrences of the expression in [Dem. Lac.] [*De forma dei*] coll. XXIII 11 and XXIV 1–2 Santoro and in Philod. *De diis* III Diels 1916–17 fr. 11.2. Cf. too Vegetti, “L’epistemologia della medicina ellenistica,” 271, and Grimaudo, “Λόγω θεωρητόν”.

<sup>33</sup> On the meaning and characteristics of the *intermundia*, see the detailed study by Rescigno, *Pluraliter: Due studi di cosmologia antica*, 57–96; as well as Manzoni, “Perché gli dei di Epicuro hanno il loro Olimpo negli *intermundia*”; and the suggestion by Drozdek, “The Problem of the Immortality of the Soul in Epicurus,” 46–50.

<sup>34</sup> See the testimony of Augustine, *Ad Diosc. epist.* 118.27 = Usener 352.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Festugière, *Epicurus and His Gods*, 73–93 (= Festugière, *Épicure et ses dieux*, 102–31) and more generally Festugière, *La révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste: Le dieu cosmique*.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Essler, “Cicero’s Use and Abuse of Epicurean Theology,” 246–52.

<sup>37</sup> Diog. Oen. NF 155 = YF 200: “Although Plato was right to acknowledge that the world had an origin, even if he was not right to introduce a divine craftsman of it, instead of employing nature as its craftsman, he was wrong to say that it is imperishable” (transl. and comm. by Hammerstaedt-Smith, “Diogenes of Oinoanda: The Discoveries of 2008,” 24–26 = Hammerstaedt-Smith, *The Epicurean Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda*, 56–58). See also Verde, “Plato’s Demiurge”; and Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, 13–66.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. on this point Warren, “Ancient Atomists on the Plurality of Worlds,” 363–64.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. in this connection Essler, “Cicero’s Use and Abuse of Epicurean Theology,” 132–33.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Philod. *De diis* III Diels 1916–17 coll. VIII 5–X 6; on the Philodemus passage, cf. Essler, “Falsche Götter bei Philodem (*Di* III Kol. 8, 5–Kol. 10, 6)”; and *Glücklich und unsterblich*, 26–330.



On the question of the “astral gods,” see Woodward, “Star Gods in Philodemus, *P.Herc.* 152/157,” 29–47.

<sup>41</sup> See now Pellacani, *Cicerone: Aratea e Prognostica*.

<sup>42</sup> Iodice, “L’*Aetna* dello Pseudovirgilio,” and Verde, “Epicurean Meteorology, Lucretius, and the *Aetna*.”

<sup>43</sup> Translation based on the Italian version of Iodice, *Appendix Vergiliana*.

<sup>44</sup> See DL 10.10, Philod. *Piet.* col. XXXI 879–89 Obbink *Philodemus: On Piety, Part I* = Arrighetti 114 = Usener 387; and *P.Oxy.* 215, especially Coll. I and III Obbink. This section was written by Emidio Spinelli.

<sup>45</sup> On the absence of providence in Epicureanism and in atomism *tout-court*, see the discussion in Alexander of Aphrodisias in his work *On Providence / Peri pronoiās* (which survives basically in Arabic translation, with the exception of a few citations in Greek that have come down in the indirect Patristic tradition), especially <1, 5>–<3, 15> (cited from Fazzo and Zonta *Alessandro di Afrodisia*).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Lact. *De ira dei* 13.19 = Usener 474, along with Spinelli, “Senza teodicea” and “‘Le dieu est la cause la plus active.’” On the critique of “theodicy,” cf. also Lucr. *DRN* 5.195 ff.

<sup>47</sup> For a full illustration of the schema, as recovered from the passage in Sextus, cf. Runia, “Atheists in Aëtius,” 565.

<sup>48</sup> In its logical structure as well, this objection seems to imitate in a polemical way the typical structure of Stoic arguments, such as the well-known “pentalemmatic” *ratio*, explicitly traced to Chrysippus, Diogenes of Babylon, and Antipater, and noted also by Cicero (*Div.* 1.38.82–84), to demonstrate the existence of divination, starting from the existence of the gods.

<sup>49</sup> In this connection, cf. Koch, *Comment peut-on être dieu?*, 51–75. This section was written by Francesco Verde.

<sup>50</sup> On friendship of god and men, cf. Hessler 2013. On friendship among the Epicurean gods, cf. Armstrong 2016 and Mitsis in this volume.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. De Sanctis, “Utile al singolo, utile a molti.”

<sup>52</sup> There is no doubt that the differences are entirely substantial and substantive, and yet, nevertheless, this kind of wholly terrestrial divinization of man is a feature that Epicureanism has in common with Christianity, which, apart from the abyss that remains between the two, celebrates at all events a god who becomes a man and who, in some sense, by “humanizing himself,” renders human beings divine in accord with a strictly reciprocal logic (on this point see more in general Ernst Bloch’s remarkable book *Atheismus im Christentum*). In ancient Christian thought we can clearly notice this (already “Platonizing”) view; to take but one example, consider several passages of Origen’s *De principiis* (*Peri arkōn*), where the emphasis is on our participation in the divine nature by following Jesus Christ’s teaching (see e.g. *De princ.* 4.4.4, according to the Latin translation by Rufinus of Aquileia: *ut si forte per hoc in quantum fieri potest per imitationem eius* [sc. *Christus*] *participes efficiamur divinae naturae*).

<sup>53</sup> The translation provided by des Places, *Atticus: Fragments*, 48 is, in fact, “causes partielles.” In *P.Herc.* 346 the term used for “co-cause” is *synaitia* (Capasso, *Trattato etico epicureo* col. X 8). See too Bonuglia, “Atticus on the Status of Platonic Ideas.” This section was written by Francesco Verde.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Piergiacomini, “A che serve venerarlo, se il dio non fa nulla?”

<sup>55</sup> In this regard, see the reasonable conclusions reached by Drozdek, “Epicurean Gods,” 165–66; cf. also Essler, *Glückselig und unsterblich*, 357–58; and especially Erler, “Epicurus as deus mortalis.”

<sup>56</sup> Ed. Capasso 1988. Cf. Verde, “Il saggio epicureo e il controllo delle passioni.”

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Alfieri, “Il concetto del divino in Democrito e in Epicuro,” 115. The fact that according to Epicurus happiness is actually available to all human beings is a point which can be considered in

common with ancient Christian thought (see too n. 52 above), especially with Paul's "cosmopolitan ideal" (on which see *Gal.* 3.26–28, and the recent work by Neutel, *A Cosmopolitan Ideal*).

## CHAPTER 6

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# DEATH

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STEPHEN E. ROSENBAUM

“DEATH is nothing to us,” Epicurus taught. He aimed with this ambiguous declaration to undermine negative ideas about death, which lead to fear, anxiety, worry, and stress, robbing people of happiness. He supported his idea by simple reasoning, thereby endorsing the utility of rational argumentation in treating fears and anxieties (*Ep. Men.*; *KD* 2). So little is now known to remain of Epicurus’s originally voluminous writing that we have few of his texts to use in interpreting this unclear statement about death.<sup>1</sup> However, what we have of his reasoning on the issue very much helps us understand what he meant, and ancient literature also helps. No other Epicurean idea has generated so much philosophical dispute in contemporary times, and recent discussion helps illuminate Epicurus’s view. The purpose of this chapter is to clarify Epicurus’s thinking about death and show that it is more philosophically agreeable and consequential than it may first appear.<sup>2</sup>

Epicurus’s views about death are linked in his systematic thinking to other central aspects of his philosophy. As already indicated, they are connected in the ethics to his conception of happiness. They are related to his physicalist metaphysics, with which he denies the possibility of an afterlife for the soul, so important in his thinking regarding death. His ideas

about death are connected further to his conception of the utility of studying philosophy, to his uncommon hedonism, and to his notions of justice and social organization. They are also related to his conception of the gods. These connections will be noted in this essay, and developed in various articles in this volume.

Like other Hellenistic ethicists, Epicurus was fundamentally concerned about *eudaimonia*—well-being, as the Greek has been often translated.<sup>3</sup> He shaped his philosophy using ideas he believed would help people live the best lives. Among other topics of human concern, he thought that human attitudes toward death contribute importantly to whether people live well. He consequently directed a significant portion of his ethical theory to ideas about death. Incorrect ideas about death, he thought, contribute to unhappiness, while correct views support living well. His idea about death formed one of four central theses concerning what he took to be basic human concerns related to living the best life. These theses were parts of his philosophical *tetrapharmakos*, a four-part “medicine” designed to engender human *eudaimonia*, by treating each of four chief sources of unhappiness.<sup>4</sup> Epicurus believed that philosophical thinking was important because it can help people live well, including helping them surmount death anxieties.<sup>5</sup>

An important part of the philosophical background of Epicurus’s idea about death is his conclusion that people do not survive their deaths personally. The idea that “death is nothing to us” should be understood in this context. Following Democritus, Epicurus as an early atomist was a complete physicalist, and believed that people are complex collections of physical atoms. Epicurus thought human souls consist solely of atoms, especially small and moveable atoms, which can move easily in the body and facilitate its manifold operations.<sup>6</sup> When people die, he believed, their atoms, including their soul atoms, which escape the confines of the body at death, disperse sooner or later into the environment.<sup>7</sup> This eventual, complete dissolution of everything that constitutes the living individual implies the impossibility of a personal human afterlife.<sup>8</sup> Epicurus thought that living, ensouled individuals are centers of consciousness, properly ordered aggregations of atoms, which at death dissipate and cease functioning. Nonexistence after death, he thought, forms the basis for regarding death as “nothing.” If there is no personal afterlife, Epicurus thought, then “death is nothing to us.”<sup>9</sup>

Many have been inclined to dismiss Epicurus's view without much thought, and most contemporary philosophical thinkers (many of whom, like Epicurus, do not endorse an afterlife) have found it disagreeable. Indeed, without interpretation and defense, it seems mistaken, hardly in need of refutation. Death can be a very painful or uncomfortable thing. How could that be “nothing” to us? Many of us are terrified of death, or at least occasionally somewhat anxious about it. How could any sensitive thinker avow in this light that it is “nothing”? People recoil from the prospect of death and commonly feel varying degrees of anxiety at the thought of having to die. How could death in the face of that reaction be “nothing”?

Philosophers have recently accepted as a philosophical axiom the idea that death is bad for us, from which they have constructed theories of why death is bad for us. I shall come to those theories, and the “intuited” axiom on which they are grounded. In opposition to initial negative reactions against the Epicurean view, and persistent philosophical objections to it, it can be justified using a little clarification and circumspect critical reflection. Additionally, it has implications for current socially important philosophical issues.

## EPICUREAN REASONING ABOUT THE VALUE OF DEATH

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Epicurus's own comments about death in the *Letter to Menoeceus* are key to understanding his idea and his reasoning for it:

Accustom yourself to thinking that death is nothing to us. For all good and bad depend on sentience (*aisthēsēi*), whereas death is the absence of sentience . . . there is nothing fearful in living for one who grasps that there is nothing fearful in not living. Therefore one speaks idly who says that he fears death not because it will be painful when present but because it is painful in prospect. For if something causes no distress when present, it yields groundless pain when merely expected. So the most horrifying evil, death, is nothing to us, because when we exist death is not present, but when death is present, we do not exist. Hence it is nothing to the living or the dead, since it does not affect the former, and the latter no longer exist.<sup>10</sup>

However incompletely clear this central passage in Epicurean ethics, it is evident that Epicurus was concerned both about the value of death for people and about death anxiety. It is clear too that ideas about the value of death for a person are supposed to be the basis for undermining death anxiety. With this passage as the background and with the understanding that Epicurus believed that those who die cease to be as persons, that there is no personal afterlife, it is possible to clarify Epicurus's view.

A first step in elucidating Epicurus's idea is to realize that the term "death" (*thanatos*) is ambiguous. "Death" can refer at least to the process of dying, to the moment separating being alive from being dead (the time of death), and to the condition of being dead itself. When a person's death is painful and we feel badly for the person who dies painfully, what is bad is the person's process of dying. Of course, we describe the process using the term "death," but the term is used to express other concepts. The process of dying of course occurs while a person lives, *before* the person dies. Epicurus should not be understood in this argument to have reasoned that the process of dying is nothing to us. Hence, rightly thinking that the dying process can be difficult or bad for people does not negate his view.<sup>11</sup>

"Death" also occasionally refers to the moment of death, the time of a person's death. When we say of a person that her death occurred at 2:01, we are referring to the exact time of the person's death, to an event that takes a very short time, perhaps beginning and ending at the time cited. We are here not talking about the dying process that brought the person to that moment, nor are we talking about what happens after that time. Epicurus displayed no concern about the moment of death, if indeed he thought of that distinct concept. The moment of death may in any case be a time which people do not fear, so much as they fear either the dying process or what happens after the time of death.

The text itself makes clear the focus of Epicurus's concern. When he says that "death is the absence of sentience" and "when we exist death is not present, but when death is present, we do not exist," he is clearly using "death" to refer to the condition of being dead, to the time after one dies.<sup>12</sup> His text would otherwise be readily questionable, as it has seemed to numerous recent philosophers who have not appreciated the ambiguity of "death." Moreover, what seems to bother people about death is not the moment of death, but rather what happens after they die, or perhaps the

physical and psychological effects of the dying process.<sup>13</sup> Epicurus primarily addressed fears associated with what might happen to one after one dies, when one is dead. There can be, he thought, no suffering and no tortures as described in the myths. When people die, they in some important sense cease to be as persons: “when [our] death is present, we do not exist.” The time after we die is what Epicurus thought is nothing to us. However, ambiguity remains.

When considering the idea that death is nothing to us, readers may object that when our friends and family die, that is certainly not “nothing to us.” It means much, and can alter our lives dramatically and negatively. How can it be “nothing”? Reflecting on this example reveals yet another ambiguity. There is an important difference between my death (my being dead) having value for me on the one hand and my death having value for others. Epicurus’s presentation does not take this difference into account. Others can be affected by our deaths, we by theirs. We can be affected by the timing and manner of their deaths. We can grieve or even rejoice over others’ deaths. However, Epicurus was thinking about the value of one’s death for oneself, not for others. He wanted primarily to comfort us against anxieties about our own deaths.

Although we now have no evidence that Epicurus himself addressed directly the matter of how death affects others, there are clues about how he would have regarded grief and pain over the deaths of others. When Epicurus was dying painfully, he took comfort in memories of experiences he had had with friends (DL 10.22). Moreover, Epicureans believed generally that recollection of past goods contribute importantly to living well (Plut. *Non posse* 1099D). Epicurus apparently would propose, opposed to the pain or grief of friends’ deaths, recalling good experiences with them while they were alive. He also thought that assimilating the principles of his thinking as early as possible would help people avoid the most severe grief and would contribute to persistent well-being (DL 10.81–82, 122). The tenets of his philosophy would convince one that the dead are beyond suffering and can no longer have pain or bad experiences, which could reduce the pain of losing a friend to death. Additionally, if the dead were happy while alive, then their lives could not have been better, however long they lived, which should also provide a measure of comfort (KD 19). So he seems to have believed that although the deaths of others can be proper



objects of grief, such grief should be ameliorated by remembrance of past goods and use of the principles of his philosophy.

Epicurus was concerned to address the condition of humans after their deaths, about the condition or state of their being dead, and about the value of that condition for those who die. He used this idea to argue against death anxiety. This is basically the condition he thought people should not fear. The argument he gave should be understood in this light. This interpretation is the only one that can accommodate his simple reasoning. In this sense of “death,” the state of being dead, death is not present when I am alive, and it is not something I can experience when I am dead. It is “nothing to me,” alive or dead. I can think about my prospective death in this sense, perhaps even about my own nonexistence. Those thoughts can be psychologically debilitating for some people, and hence bad for them. But thoughts about death, whatever their effects on people, are not death itself. So if ideas about death cause people to have negative feelings, which may be said to be bad for them, it does not in any way show that death itself is bad.

These simple clarifications make Epicurus’s declaration about death far less objectionable than it might at first seem. Perhaps they are not sufficient to persuade people that death is not bad for them, and is thus not to be feared, but they make his view less easy to dismiss without further thought. Consideration of the extensive and growing philosophical literature on the value of death, especially that literature which has apparently argued against Epicurus, has helped develop Epicurus’s idea. It is important first to understand the central elements of Epicurus’s reasoning and how the argument might be vulnerable.

The most fundamental support for Epicurus’s idea comes from his now controversial thesis about value.<sup>14</sup> He thought that something can have value for someone, can be good or bad for someone, only if the person is able to experience it at some time (“all good and bad depend on sentience” *Ep. Men.*). A person’s sentience ends at death, along with the capacity to experience, if there is no afterlife. In general, sentience in this context involves being affected by some event and being able to be aware of the effects of the event at some time. So his idea was that unless an event can affect a person and unless the person is capable of being aware of that event at some time, then the event or condition can have no value for the person.<sup>15</sup>

Since Epicurus believed that after they die people do not exist and they lose sentience, he thought they were not capable of experiencing anything after they die. They cannot as persons be affected by any events, and cannot be aware of any effects. Their bodies might be affected, but the functioning persons once affiliated with those corpses cannot be affected (having ceased to function), and they cannot be aware of being affected. Therefore, Epicurus thought, nothing bad can happen to people after they die. Bad things could happen to their bodies, but not to themselves as persons. Since only after they die are they in a condition of being dead then the condition of being dead cannot be bad for the dead. These are the central elements in Epicurus's reasoning.<sup>16</sup>

## OBJECTIONS TO EPICUREAN THINKING ABOUT DEATH

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One reaction many recent thinkers have had to Epicurus's idea is that however cogent his reasoning, he misidentified the basic human concern about death. What he argued is not bad for people may be something people are not really concerned about, or not very concerned about. People may not really be afraid of the condition of being dead, and many may not be concerned about suffering in an afterlife. Nevertheless, they are anxious about death. They may instead be concerned about losing what they have in life, goods they have accumulated, opportunities to have more experiences, and in general not being able to do the things they want to do (finish important projects; visit with and follow the fortunes of children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren; see what happens in the future; and many other things). They may be anxious about or at least strongly averse to being deprived of life and all being alive involves. Accordingly, perhaps the strongest contemporary objection to Epicurus's view is that what is bad about death is not that after we die we do not exist, but that our death deprives us of what we would otherwise live to experience. It may be what dying makes us lose that makes death bad for us, if what we lose is on balance good.<sup>17</sup> Most recent philosophers have taken this view, the "deprivation argument," for the badness of human death. This general idea

has for years been realized in various versions. My comments will apply generally to the different versions.<sup>18</sup>

One immediate reply to this concern is that even if death deprives people of various goods they would otherwise have had, those dead cannot experience or suffer from losing or being deprived of what they lose.<sup>19</sup> If death brings losses or deprivations, those losses cannot be experienced, and so cannot be bad for the dead. Using the principle about value Epicurus illuminated in his reasoning, that “all good and bad depend on sentience,” how could such deprivations be bad for people? People will not be affected by them and cannot be aware of them, mind them, or suffer from them, having lost their existence/sentience at the same time the losses began. Some even think that because of not missing or being able to miss that of which death would deprive one, there are no real deprivations in death.<sup>20</sup> They believe that the concept of deprivation does not apply to what happens to those who die. In any case one cannot miss or suffer from whatever he or she loses in death. This essentially undermines the criticism.

Most contemporary philosophers, in the context of the idea that there is no afterlife, have been immune to the fact that being deprived of goods by death cannot be experienced by those who die. They have mostly ignored the point. They have at least implicitly, and rarely explicitly, endorsed an alternative conception of value or an alternative conception of deprivation. According to their notion, it does not matter that people who die cannot experience the deprivations their deaths cause, because those critics adopt a concept of value according to which something can be good or bad for someone without having any effects on that person. They endorse the idea that value for a person does not depend on sentience or existence, contrary to Epicurus.

The recent debate among philosophers began with the realization that whether death is bad for people depends on “assumptions about good and evil.”<sup>21</sup> At least two different notions of value, or principles about value, should be considered in this context. Only if one gives up Epicurus’s principle that good and bad require sentience and adopts an alternative could one rightly think that death is bad for people. The alternative principle is that something may have value for someone, even if it has and can have no effects on the person in question.<sup>22</sup> This alternative has been used to argue not only that death is bad for people, but also that people are

subject to posthumous harm, that they can be harmed by events after they die.<sup>23</sup>

Epicurus's principle of value is clear enough, but the other notion needs explication. The idea used by those who reject the Epicurean view is that not only can one think that dying, the moment of death, or the condition of being dead can be bad for people, but also the fact that people die when they do might be bad for people. What is or can be bad about death, they think, is the fact that a person dies at a certain time in the course of life. According to Epicurean critics, facts about people may be good or bad for them, even when those facts do not involve causal effects on those about whom they are facts. Without a link to sentience or feelings, or effects on people, facts might according to the different principle of value be good or bad without having any effects or causing any awareness or feelings. Facts thus might be good or bad even for those who are dead and no longer exist. On the basis of this alternative principle, many current thinkers endorse the badness of death for people.<sup>24</sup>

Some examples of this notion of value, which I call "abstract," in contrast to Epicurus's, which I call "concrete," would be useful. Facts are abstract, being propositions and not being able to stand in causal relations, unlike events, occurrences, or happenings, which are able to cause other events and be caused by other events. Historians and military strategists have for example come to regard Alexander as one of history's best military strategists. This occurred after Alexander's death, as historians and military practitioners such as Julius Caesar and Napoleon came to appreciate his success in battle. That he has come to be so regarded is a fact about Alexander, even if he was never affected by the fact and even if he never thought of it. According to some, this fact can be good for Alexander, Alexander the person. We would commonly think that this fact is about Alexander's legacy, and we could evaluate his legacy having this feature, but we might balk at thinking this fact to be good for Alexander the man, distinct from his legacy.<sup>25</sup>

Philosophers sympathetic to this abstract conception of value use it to explain the badness of death for a person, when they think death is bad for someone. Their view is that although death is not always bad for someone, when death is bad for a person it is bad because of certain facts about the person, or about certain features of the person's history, narrative, or legacy.

When, for example, a person dies before she is able to complete an important piece of scientific research that she had aimed to complete, this fact may be supposed to be bad for her, the person. It does not matter that the person may never have known about the fact, that the person does not even exist, or does not mind the fact. The fact is true of the person, even if she can never be affected by it. Using this abstract conception or principle of value, some philosophers reason that death can at least sometimes be bad for people, apparently contrary to what Epicurus thought.<sup>26</sup>

Those who adopt this alternative conception of value, and use it to argue against Epicurus, have not considered the logical relationship of their objection to Epicurus's view about death. In light of how his basic view is rightly interpreted, that view is centrally about one's condition or state after one dies. It does not concern facts about one which are not connected to any experiences. What is the logical relationship? Suppose that facts about one, which are not related to any experiences one has, can have some kind of value or can be good or bad for one. It does not follow from this that one's being dead can be bad for one, in the sense in which Epicurus denied that death is bad. In fact, no one who has adopted such a view of the badness of death has to my knowledge concluded that Epicurus's view about death, rightly understood, is mistaken. There is no logical relationship.<sup>27</sup> Many critics speak about death's being bad for people, but their claim, along with its justification, does not negate Epicurus's argument that death is not bad for people. They are talking about an alternative, logically independent conception of value, and using that conception differently. However useful in some respects, using it to refute Epicurus's view about death is unjustifiably to confuse a person with his or her legacy, history, or narrative. Most recent critics have just ignored Epicurus's idea of value, perhaps as a relic from a poorly enlightened antiquity, and they have implicitly adopted a different idea. It remains to be seen whether and how this different idea of value is otherwise significant.

Another objection to Epicurus is based on simple question-begging acceptance of the idea that "death is bad for people." Some philosophers insist that it is just obvious that if anything is bad for people, death is bad, maybe the worst thing. Philosophers designate such an opinion an "intuition," suggesting that it has privileged epistemic status. Many accept as a fundamental axiom the badness of death for individuals who die, which should not be questioned unless there is some overriding reason to

challenge it. This “intuition,” coupled with its philosophical development and wide acceptance, then is supposed to place a burden of proof on those who would deny it. The theoretical accounts of how death is bad for people then come to define the way in which death is bad for people, and those accounts typically explain the badness of death in terms of loss or deprivation, which is related to the so-called “deprivation argument.” The explanation of death’s badness, however, if explained by deprivation, using the same abstract conception of value, is not logically related to Epicurus’s view. It is consistent with Epicurus’s thesis about death, and does not negate his idea.

The difficulty with relying on the “intuition” that death is bad for people is that the “intuition” is not at all clear, and yields little useful guidance in the development of ideas about death. Moreover, those with negative emotions and feelings associated with thoughts about death are overly eager to endorse some description that seems as if it might capture the content of those emotions. Strong feelings conjoined with unclear language lay the basis for inappropriate, misleading philosophical ideas. The ambiguity of the words by which the intuition is expressed is apparent from the earlier analysis of Epicurus’s claim that “death is nothing to us.” The terms “bad,” “tragedy,” “misfortune,” and others are commonly used to apply to death, and it is not clear whether we are applying those terms to the timing of a person’s death in relation to some narrative, to the process of dying, to the moment of death, to the manner of death, or to the condition of being dead. It is also not clear whether we are assessing the value of death for the individual dead or for the person’s friends and family. In the absence of a full examination of how exactly we assess death using all the expressions we use to do it, it is premature to endorse the badness of death and the negation of Epicurus’s view, especially in the context of very strong and misleading negative feelings about death. Critics begin with implicit and obscure denial of Epicurus’s principle of value about death—that value depends on sentience—and end up with a theoretical account of the badness of death that is logically unrelated to Epicurus’s view. Our negative feelings about death can no more easily be turned into a plausible denial of Epicurean ideas than can a mystical experience be readily turned into a theology. Perhaps Epicurus’s and closely related thinking about death can help undermine negative feelings and ideas, and help people on the road to happiness, which is what Epicurus was trying to do.

Some would object to Epicurean thanatology on the ground that it seems incompatible with a general prohibition against killing. If death is not bad for people, then what could be wrong with killing them? I know of no scholarship that makes a case that Epicurus's view about death is incompatible with the wrongness of killing, but some thinkers have in conversation suggested this point to me (without offering justification).<sup>28</sup> However, if Epicurus's idea could not be reconciled to, or were incompatible with, the wrongness of killing, it would appear questionable. It is valuable to address the point because it will shed light on Epicurean ideas of morality (justice) and show the flaw in the objection.

We have no evidence that Epicurus himself thought about the relation between his view of death and the morality of killing. He was a contractarian, however, thinking that right and wrong, justice, come from principles in a social contract (*synthēkē*), justified and explained by its usefulness for society.<sup>29</sup> The prohibition against killing was in the compact. Hermarchus, scholar after the death of Epicurus, used principles of Epicurean morality to explain the nature of justice and specifically to address the morality of killing. Explaining why the compact included a prohibition against murder or killing, he said that such behavior "is not useful to the general structure of human life."<sup>30</sup> The idea that a moral principle forbidding murder comes from a contract, justified by its social utility, is certainly compatible with the denial of the badness of death for people who die. The objection assumes that murder can be contrary to a moral principle only if killing is bad for those killed. But other types of reasons can be the basis for murder being wrong. The Epicurean idea of justice shows the compatibility of thinking both that death is not bad for people and that killing is wrong, contrary to principles of proper behavior.<sup>31</sup>

One of the more interesting recent objections to the Epicurean view of death regards the possibility of making certain comparative evaluations about life and death.<sup>32</sup> We sometimes compare life and death axiologically, especially when we think about the rationality of a person's suicide, when we think about whether it would be proper for a person to be euthanized, or when we generally assess the timing of someone's death. For example, when we judge that a person's suicide was a tragedy, we may do so on the basis of thinking that the person would have had a better and more productive life overall, if she had continued living and not committed



suicide. Her life might have been better if she had continued living. Thinking this way may be tantamount to thinking that her dying when she did (the timing of death in her life narrative) is worse for her than her continuing to live, or bad in relation to continued living. Sometimes we may believe that an act of euthanasia was merciful, or good for a person, on the ground that his death was better for him than continuing to live would have been. In this case we are thinking that dying when he did was good in comparison to continued life. If death can have value in these ways, can be bad or good in relation to continued life, then it might appear that Epicurus was mistaken in believing that because the dead lack sentience death can have no value for people.

The Epicurean view of death thus seems to undermine the basis for our thinking, for example, that a person would be better off dead, or better off continuing to live. These thoughts appear to imply that death can have positive or negative value for people. Such comparative judgments, which people make regularly, might seem impossible on the Epicurean view. Without such comparisons, how would it be conceivable to think about and assess the justifiability of suicide or of euthanasia? How might it be better for a person to continue living than to commit suicide? How might it be better for a person to die rather than live in pain and psychological misery? Specifically, is Epicurus's view compatible with such thoughts and judgments?

Consider the question in light of the difference between the kind of value used in Epicurus's reasoning and the kind of value used by the deprivation argument/explanation, discussed earlier. Recall that the difference between the two principles of value is that according to Epicurus's notion, events can have value for people only if people can experience them, can be affected by them, and be aware of them at some time. This concrete idea of value is different from the abstract notion that propositions expressing facts (possibly unrelated to events of which people could be aware) about people can have value for them.

Returning to the earlier example about Alexander, the fact that Alexander has come to be regarded as an exemplary military strategist, a fact of which he could never have been aware, might be thought to be good for Alexander the person. People with this abstract idea of value attach good and bad for people to facts, which they regard as positive or negative. The difficulty with doing this, however, is that it obscures the difference

between two kinds of value, value for individuals themselves on the one hand and value for their legacies or narratives. Without this distinction, a person's legacy, developed and refined hundreds of years after a person's death, could be literally good or bad for the person who lived and died long ago. Good or bad in the same way that some disadvantage or benefit could have been good or bad for the person while alive. One need not deny the notion of abstract value involved in assessing a person's legacy while denying that the value of a person's legacy is a value for the person. The abstract conception of value is a tool in the range of judgments people make, and has its place in making important judgments. Such judgments include comparative judgments which some think challenge Epicurus's thanatology. However, the use of such conceptions is compatible with Epicurus's idea.<sup>33</sup>

One can account for comparative value judgments in terms of the abstract conception of value I used earlier in discussing the "deprivation argument." If one thinks that propositions about a person may have value for the person, even without being associated with effects on the person, one can explain the comparisons in terms of the value of facts or propositions for people. We can think that these comparisons are judgments about the relative value of different sets of propositions about a person's life, actual and possible narratives about a person's life story or history. When we think, for example, that it would be better for a person to continue living than to die, we are judging that the narrative in which the person continues to live is better than the narrative in which the person dies.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps this belief is because we think that the person's life would contain more satisfactions than otherwise, whether we can know this or not. Similarly, when we believe that it would be better for the person to die than to continue living, we are thinking that the story in which the person dies rather than continues to live is better than the one in which the person continues to live. This may be because we believe that the person would have had an unacceptable level of pain or psychological suffering if she continued to live. In order to think such things we need not endorse the idea that the time after a person's death could be bad for the person. Therefore, the making of such comparative judgments as described does not refute the Epicurean idea.<sup>35</sup>

However varied in their particular conceptual complexity, the objections to Epicurus's thesis that death is not bad for people fall into categories of

objection discussed. Most objections involve the idea that death can deprive people of good and that death is for that reason bad for them. Because this objection depends on a notion of value different from that of Epicurus and because of its logical status, it does not refute his view. It remains to be determined just how important this point is, because its importance depends on what people care about when they reflect on death, and how important it is to them. I shall address these questions in what follows, in discussing the fear of death and the implications of Epicurus's view.

## DEATH ANXIETY

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The other main element of Epicurus's thanatology concerned death anxiety. His goal in arguing against the badness of death for people was to undermine death anxiety, since that anxiety minifies or perhaps undermines well-being. How does the argument oppose the fear of death? Although the expression "the fear of death" is quite common, one should begin with the realization that death anxiety is diverse, and that there is no single "fear of death." There are different objects of death anxiety, because people fear different things when they think about death. Additionally, the psychological intensity of negative feelings about the various objects will also differ for different individuals, even psychologically healthy individuals without "phobias." The question of death anxiety is more complicated than available Epicurean texts make it appear.<sup>36</sup>

In confronting death, people have negative feelings about the process of dying, including the possible physical and psychological pain of dying. They have anxieties about being dead, or perhaps the thought of being dead. They may simply fear the unknown, perhaps implicitly associating death with some unknown kind of experience. They may fear the fact that they will die sometime, and they may also fear the fact that they may die before they want or before they accomplish certain goals. A complete treatment of death anxiety is impossible in the course of this discussion, but it is possible to address to some extent particular fears about death that were considered by Epicurus or his followers, or addressed implicitly based on what we know about Epicurus and his philosophy.

Epicurus was concerned centrally about fears associated with one's continuing to be conscious after death, including fears associated with the stories of punishments and tortures after life. His view that nothing bad can happen to people after they die was the basis for his thinking that such fears are groundless. Being dead is not bad for people, he thought, and cannot cause them distress, since they do not exist to experience distress. They lack sentience. Since it cannot harm people or cause them distress people should not fear it. Again, he supposed that reasoning is capable of altering feelings and eliminating fear.<sup>37</sup> The psychologically therapeutic nature of reasoning need not be such that the reasoning is immediately effective, and capable of reducing improper feelings at the same time one first understands an argument and fails quickly to discern objections to it. The efficacy of the argumentation on the feeling might be psychologically more complex, requiring extended meditation, further reading, and continual review of and reflection on the reasoning. In any case, Epicurus accepted the power of cognitive therapy, and thought that the therapy could undermine fears associated with being dead but having negative experiences nonetheless. Although Epicurus opposed fear of being dead and the prospect of tortures in an afterlife, his ideas also implicitly oppose other fears.<sup>38</sup>

Against the fear of tortures in an afterlife, Epicurus's conception of the gods also supports his view that in death we have nothing to fear. He conceived of the nature of the gods in such a way that the gods were by nature incapable of causing humans trouble. Epicurus conceived the gods as blessed (*makarion*) and therefore naturally incapable of troubling humans or feeling anger or gratitude towards anyone.<sup>39</sup> He believed that it was impious to think the gods capable of caring whether humans suffer or not, because that implies the gods are weak and not blessed.<sup>40</sup>

Before considering other fears for which Epicurean ideas offer an antidote, it is important to introduce a well-known idea from Lucretius, which has been widely discussed among recent classicists and philosophers. It also has a legacy of engaging philosophical minds through history since Lucretius wrote his poem.<sup>41</sup> Lucretius as a good Epicurean was concerned to undermine the fear of death, and used a creative idea to make the case. At two places in Lucretius's poem, where he discussed the value and fear of death in Book 3, he described a symmetrical relationship between our past, pre-vital nonexistence, and our future posthumous nonexistence:

Just as in the past we had no sensation of discomfort when the Carthaginians were converging to attack, so too, when we will no longer exist . . . you can take it that nothing at all will be able to affect us and to stir our sensations.<sup>42</sup>

And in the second occurrence:

Look back also and see how the ages of everlasting time past before we were born have been to us nothing. This therefore is a mirror which nature holds up to us, showing the time to come after we at length shall die. Is there anything horrible in that? Is there anything gloomy?<sup>43</sup>

Lucretius's comments have been interpreted in different ways, and the various interpretations have been discussed extensively. However, he seems to have urged in one place that one should fear one's death, one's future nonexistence, no more than one fears one's pre-vital nonexistence, since the two times are relevantly alike. Since people do not fear their pre-vital nonexistence, they should not fear their posthumous nonexistence. Although the point of the symmetry idea is arguably different in the two different places in which it occurs in the poem, at least one of the occurrences seems to have been directed against fearing death on the ground that one does not have fears or negative attitudes about one's previous nonexistence, before birth.

Reviewing fully the interpretation of Lucretius's comments or elements of the philosophical dialectic is not necessary here. The philosophical discussion regarding the so-called symmetry argument against fearing death has centered on two main issues: whether prenatal and posthumous nonexistence are the same or relevantly similar and whether it might be reasonable to have different attitudes toward one's prenatal nonexistence and one's posthumous nonexistence. Whatever the outcome of a deep and thorough philosophical examination of what seems a Lucretian symmetry argument against death anxiety, the idea has been of some help to those feeling anxious about their deaths.<sup>44</sup>

People who fear death may for psychological or cognitive considerations be somewhat confused about what the object of their fear is. Not being able easily to subtract themselves from their ideas of what being dead will be like, even when they consider the possibility of not being conscious of anything in death, they may associate being dead with unpleasant experiences of being dead or perhaps with a dreadful experience of

nothingness itself. Epicureans dealt with such psychologically complex fears as well. Philosophers have sometimes been sensitive to human psychology, and Lucretius was, among others, aware of this possible psychological basis for death anxiety. Lucretius wrote (Lucr. *DRN* 3.870–83, trans. Rouse and Smith):

When you see a man resent the prospect of his body's being buried and rotting after death, or being destroyed by fire or by the jaws of wild beasts, you may be sure that his words do not ring true, and that there lurks in his heart some hidden sting, however much he may deny the belief that he will have any sensation in death. For he does not, I think, grant either the substance or the ground of what he professes. Instead of completely stripping himself of life, he unconsciously makes some bit of himself survive . . . he does not distinguish himself from [his body] or adequately detach himself from the abandoned corpse; he subconsciously identifies himself with it, and by remaining present, contaminates it with his own consciousness.

People may psychologically have a difficult time separating their consciousnesses from their imagining of what it could be like to be dead or to be corpses, and so “contaminate” their prospective corpses with their own continuing consciousnesses. Lucretius's implicit advice is to be sure to subtract oneself fully from the picture one forms of one's being dead, and ensure that in one's imagination, one's consciousness is fully and permanently extinguished.<sup>45</sup>

A somewhat different death anxiety is fear about the process of dying, which can, as we know, be more or less painful. People often fear a painful or psychologically troubling process of dying. Of course, this fear is not about what happens in death, but what happens at the end of one's life. Epicurus directly addressed physical pain in general as one element in the *tetrapharmakos*.<sup>46</sup> He thought that acute pain does not last very long, and that pleasure is available to compensate for bodily pain. This optimistic assessment of physical pain and its negligibility would of course apply to any physical pain associated with the dying process. Any pain in dying would, he thought, either be tolerable and even able to be overcome by pleasure, or, if intolerable, accompanied by a rapid death. One may well have doubts about the truth of this doctrine, especially when taking into account different pain tolerances of different people. It seems that dying could be accompanied by considerable pain, even in the contemporary world of advanced pain management. Whether and to what extent it is to be

feared is a different question. Epicurus's thoughts about various pains of dying may well not supply the relief he intended.

Epicurus's comments about why pain is not so fearful seem to focus on physical pain. Yet, we know he was concerned about mental or psychological pain, and regarded mental pain as worse than physical.<sup>47</sup> The discomforts of almost any dying process can be aggravated by psychological factors, such as depression, anxiety, and hopelessness. Thus might psychological factors make the pain of dying worse or less easily bearable than it might be without those elements. Perhaps physical pain in dying is enhanced by these, and other, psychological factors. This is associated with distress that might come from realizing that one is about to die. The Epicurean antidote to this aspect of the dying process is in general his view that death is not bad for people, along with therapeutic methods that aim to undermine death anxiety. So Epicurus appears to have thought that the pain of the dying process is no worse than any other kind of physical pain, which is relatively easily borne, and that the fact that the process leads to death is irrelevant to how intense the pain is. Any fear of death may well be based on those beliefs which in general Epicurus was trying to undermine by his thesis that death is not bad for us, and is thus subject to basic Epicurean argumentation against the fear of death. The psychological discomfort of anxiety about the dying process is arguably due largely to false beliefs about whether death is bad for us, to be ameliorated by reasoning against the badness of death.

Some people are anxious about dying prematurely.<sup>48</sup> The very old, enfeebled by age, and past the most active, productive portions of their lives, seem in general less anxious or uncomfortable when contemplating their deaths. The relatively young, however, who would ordinarily have the most productive parts of their lives before them, may be more anxious when considering their deaths. Does Epicurean thinking address this fear of dying "too soon"? Epicurus's idea, that life can be complete in a short time as well as a long one and at virtually any age, does address the fear, although controversially. Epicurus held that once one achieves the good end, the *telos*, that end cannot be enhanced by temporal extension.<sup>49</sup>

A life of *eudaimonia* in Epicurean thinking is incompletely understood, especially since it consists in pleasure of an unusual type.<sup>50</sup> Interpreters are hindered by a paucity of texts, and usually address issues that, however



relevant to understanding Epicurus's hedonism, are not central. It was, however, thought to be complete once one achieved it. A complete life of well-being, for Epicurus, can no more be enhanced than a state of perfect health.<sup>51</sup> It might become longer, but there is no criterion by which it could become better. Therefore, if such a life lasts for a short time, it is just as good at being a perfect human life as a flourishing life of eighty years. Emphasizing quality over quantity, Epicurus thought that extending a perfect human life does not make that life better. If one could come to accept this view of life, it could help undermine fear of dying too soon.<sup>52</sup>

Some thinkers explain the fear of premature death in terms of a rather different conception of human life and happiness. According to their idea, a fully human life has a natural structure and an associated notion of completeness, which takes time and cannot be achieved in a limited period, as Epicurus appears to have thought. Humans make plans and pursue goals, which are supposed to be meaningful only on the supposition that those plans can be pursued over time and completed in a "normal" human lifespan.<sup>53</sup> The fear of premature death might be the fear that such plans and aims will be uncompleted or even meaningless. Death is supposed to be able to undermine the meaning of human activities incorporated within an appropriate life plan because it can interrupt the temporal course of those activities and make impossible their proper completion. This idea depends on the principle that a plan within a human life is meaningful only if it is completed. The Epicurean view of the role of goals, aims, or desires in a human life seems to be that they lay the basis for lives which have the quality of (katastematic) pleasure, by which people live in a state of *ataraxia/aponia*, without the wrong kinds of desires.<sup>54</sup> In order to supply meaning to a life, goals might not need to be accomplished, but rather just to guide the life's activities in a certain deeply engaging way. In any case this is one of the controversies to be resolved by further discussion and analysis.<sup>55</sup>

Some people have anxiety about the simple fact that they are mortal, that they will one day die. Do Epicurean texts address this fear? One comment Epicurus made seems possibly to have considered this object of death anxiety (*Ep. Men.*):

A correct understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality [*thnēton*] of life enjoyable [*apolauston*], not by adding infinite time, but by ridding us of the desire for

immortality.

A proper understanding of this comment is no doubt complex and must take into account various basic aspects of Epicurean ethics. It is nevertheless clear that if this comment is about the fear of mortality, the treatment of this fear depends on the basic Epicurean view that “death is nothing to us.” So the fear would be treated as a part of the Epicurean doctrine that death has no value for the dead, as well as full explication of its implications. The proper understanding of the idea that mortality is “enjoyable” does not yield the idea that we should enjoy the fact of our mortality, but rather be content with the fact of our mortality. Epicurean ethics may not have considered every aspect of death anxiety, the various different objects and the different intensities with which people feel their death anxiety, but it was more extensive than one might initially think.<sup>56</sup>

## IMPLICATIONS

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Death is a concern for many people, and is also an element in some of the most pressing moral issues in human life. Philosophers have recently considered philosophical issues related to death and have consequently attended more to the rich supply of ideas about death from the ancient world. Although Epicurus wrote for an earlier world, his view, properly understood, suggests novel contributions to contemporary thinking. It promises to engender rethinking numerous current issues related to death. It would be useful to conclude this review of Epicurean thanatology by exploring briefly some of its possible implications and at least some of the outstanding issues to be resolved in thinking about it.

Philosophers have recently addressed the question of whether people can be harmed by events occurring after they are dead. There has been significant literature on whether people can be harmed posthumously. As one might suspect from the previous discussion, the Epicurean view of death implies that people cannot “suffer,” or, perhaps better said, experience or “undergo,” literal, concrete posthumous harm. The opposing philosophical view is that people can be harmed posthumously, because facts may well be true of people after they die as a result of which they are

harm, even though they cannot suffer from or experience the harms to which they are subject.<sup>57</sup> The idea that people can be harmed posthumously has been based on the idea that people have interests before they die, interests which somehow persist and can thus be harmed by events occurring after they are dead. Harm is then conceived as a violation of a person's interests. In light of the violation of their interests the dead are supposed to be harmed, even though they do not exist at the time they are said to be harmed and cannot experience being harmed. Whether a person is harmed after death clearly depends on what concept of harm one uses. The issue can be resolved only through a thorough consideration of the nature of harm, and also a consideration of how important it is that interests one had during life are contrary to events happening after one's death.

Another issue raised by the Epicurean view of death concerns the death penalty. If death is not bad for those who die, is the so-called "death penalty" a penalty?<sup>58</sup> In the Roman senatorial debate about how to punish the Catilinarian conspirators, Julius Caesar argued from an Epicurean point of view that death was not a penalty for the conspirators on the ground that "death is the end of all suffering" and that the conspirators deserved worse (Sall. *Cat.* 50.1.20–25). If one's conception of a punishment includes doing something bad to someone, assuming that the penalty of death is being dead (not some form of dying process, or the fact about one that one dies at a certain time, or having a legacy which includes being killed by the state), then how can death be a punishment? It seems that death's being a real punishment depends on punishment being conceived differently, according to which punishments do not need to be literally and concretely bad for those punished, unlike tortures, fines, and incarcerations.<sup>59</sup> Is death a penalty because it changes a person's legacy, or makes facts true of the person, which the person has an interest in not being true? Is it a penalty because it affects a person's legacy in a way in which he does not want it to be affected? What makes the death penalty a punishment? Further philosophical reflection is needed to address this issue fully. The question is indeed important partly because of the continuing controversial character of the death penalty.

Regarding earlier consideration of the objection against Epicurus that his view of death is incompatible with the general wrongness of killing, it is apparent that one implication of the Epicurean view is the possible need in the context of modern theories for a reconsideration of why killing is

wrong. Clearly, if death is not bad for people, then the wrongness of killing could not be based on the badness of death for people.<sup>60</sup> Of course, Epicurus thought that killing is wrong, but based that view on the idea that justice (morality—right and wrong) comes from a compact, which includes the principle that it is wrong to kill people. The compact is warranted by its overall social utility. The wrongness of killing can be accommodated in various types of contractarian views, which need not depend on the principle that death is bad for people.<sup>61</sup>

Death anxiety is another issue that merits further reflection in light of Epicurus's view. Of course there are, as indicated, numerous feelings and levels of feeling that count as fears of death. If Epicurus is correct about the most central such fear having as its object what happens to one after one dies (and one is a particular center of consciousness), and he is correct that events can have value for people only if they are sentient or existent, then his view directly addresses the central object of fear. However, if one of the fears of death is that one's legacy or life narrative will be damaged by one's dying prematurely, then the object of death anxiety will be different from what Epicurus thought and for which he offered conceptual resources. Many recent philosophical thinkers have at least implicitly thought that the fear of death is mostly a fear that one's death will make certain facts true of one, even if those facts do not entail that one is affected badly. Those facts which one's death would make true, if bad for one, would be facts about the narrative of one's life. Unless there was anxiety regarding how the timing of one's death would affect one's legacy or narrative, how could the badness of deprivation in any way make the fear of death seem reasonable?<sup>62</sup>

Epicurus's view and opposition to it raise the question of whether fear of a bad life narrative or legacy should be included among the many fears of death. No philosophical methods or textual considerations can resolve the issue of what should be or is included among fears of death, but it might be useful for people to reflect on what their greatest anxieties about death are. On this matter, psychology could offer professional assistance. In any case, depending on one's anxieties about death, the Epicurean treatment of death anxiety can be to some extent comforting. In light of what people think and feel, different philosophical positions may be more or less valuable to them. Other issues relating to death are subject to further thought and evaluation as well.

Although Epicurus's ideas about death come from the very different world of ancient culture and philosophy and reflect a philosophical outlook which may seem alien to contemporary thought and philosophical inclination, they constitute a defensible view that has important implications for contemporary moral ideas and methods as well as for personal issues. For those with a commitment to contemporary philosophical tenets and methods, Epicurean thanatology will be viewed with suspicion. Partly because of its ancient historical status, its content contrary to received views, and a relative scarcity of texts, it has not been thoroughly explored. Its implications have also not been fully understood and appreciated. Yet, it has the potential to make a significant difference to how thinkers regard a number of moral issues related to death. Aspects of Epicurean philosophy have been considered more thoroughly in recent scholarship, and will continue to be considered. Epicurean thinking about death is one additional example of the importance of classical thinking for contemporary life.

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps as Italians excavate and papyrologists and classicists record and translate more Epicurean texts from Herculaneum’s Villa dei Papyri, we may have more to go on.

<sup>2</sup> My chief concern is to understand the basic principles of Epicurus’s philosophical thinking about death and its value for people, not to offer a complete account and analysis of the details of his comments about death in those texts to which we have access. There are textual puzzles in remaining Epicurean texts, but I focus on the basis for the thesis about death.

<sup>3</sup> The word “happiness” is sometimes used, but in English now connotes mostly subjective satisfaction or contentment. *Eudaimonia* in Greek meant much more, including certain objective conditions of one’s life and being active in certain ways. “Happiness” is commonly regarded as an inadequate translation, although I shall occasionally use it for the sake of suggesting the relationship between Epicurean thinking and basic human concerns. See Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 15 where it is translated as “human flourishing.”

<sup>4</sup> Philodemus, *Against the Sophists*, 4.9–14. Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 116; Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, 19. The *tetrapharmakos* is summarized in KD 1–4.

<sup>5</sup> Usener, *Epicurea*, 221: “Empty are those philosophical theories that treat no human suffering [*pathos*].”



<sup>6</sup> While most ancient Greek thinkers endorsed the idea of a human soul, that concept was in ancient Greece used to account for life and did not connote as it does in the modern world a metaphysically immaterial substance. Ancient philosophical accounts of souls differed largely with respect to the nature of souls, not with respect to whether there are souls. While Epicurus and other atomists believed souls are composite and destructible, made up of physical parts conjoined temporarily, thinkers such as Plato argued that souls are non-composite and indestructible.

<sup>7</sup> Plato refers in *Phaedo* to an atomistic view of the soul, according to which the soul dissipates at death (70a–b), and jokes later about those having a childish fear of dying in a high wind (77d–e). Lucretius in *DRN* 3.847–50 considers the possibility that one’s soul atoms might at some time in the future be reassembled, but argues that the resulting assemblage would not matter to us.

<sup>8</sup> See Epicurus’s *Ep. Hdt.* in DL 10.65–68.

<sup>9</sup> Lucretius has numerous interesting arguments in *DRN* 3 as to why souls are physical and why physical souls will not have an afterlife.

<sup>10</sup> *Ep. Men.* Further illuminating comments are in Epicurus’s *Ep. Hdt.* at DL 10.81.

<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that Epicurus has nothing to say about the badness of the process of dying, since he does express ideas that bear on the badness of dying. However, the argument from Menoeceus, cited earlier, is not about the dying process.

<sup>12</sup> *KD* 2 also makes this clear: “what has been dissolved lacks sentience and what lacks sentience is nothing to us.”

<sup>13</sup> The exact nature of the human fear of death is not clear, and there probably is no single anxiety that answers to the phrase “the fear of death.” This is one of the most important issues still insufficiently addressed in the literature about death, but Epicurus does address at least some attitudes which may properly be described by the phrase.

<sup>14</sup> Most recent philosophers who have objected to Epicurus’s view of death have done so by implicitly adopting a different principle of value. I discuss this concept later.

<sup>15</sup> For a fuller discussion of the nature of the reasoning, see Rosenbaum, “How to Be Dead.”

<sup>16</sup> Epicurus expresses in *Menoceus* two reasons for thinking that death is not bad for us. One is that we no longer are capable of sentience in death. The other is that in death we no longer exist as the persons we were. Warren and Tsouna are certainly correct to point out that Epicurus had two distinguishable arguments against the badness of death: Warren, *Facing Death*, 19; Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, 248 ff. I am not distinguishing those different arguments here, because either argument suffices, *mutatis mutandis*, to combine with the principle of valuation to show that after death nothing can be bad for the dead.

<sup>17</sup> Another version of this idea focuses on how death may change the quality of our lives. Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire* and Furley, “*Nothing to Us?*” claim that death can rob certain lives of meaning and value, and can thus be bad for us, independently of what would have happened in the future. However, this version is subject to the same concerns that the other has, with suitable adjustments.

<sup>18</sup> For a very few of those who advocate the deprivation argument or the badness of death based on what one loses, in one form or another, but a representative sample, see Nagel, “Death”; Williams, “The Makropulos Case”; Furley, “*Nothing to Us?*”; Striker, “Commentary on Mitsis”; Feldman, *Confrontations*; Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*; Kaufman, “Death and Deprivation”; Bradley, *Well-being and Death*; Luper, *Philosophy of Death*.

<sup>19</sup> Lucretius is convinced by this point, in *DRN* 3.894–903: Those who in death lose all the *praemia vitae* “do not retain any desire for these things.” See also *DRN* 3.870–93; and Warren, *Facing Death*, 22. Philodemus makes the same point early in *On Death* 1.2, when he notes that “deprivation of good things [in death], being accompanied by unconsciousness [*anas[thē]sian*], is painless and not such as in life.” Trans. W. Benjamin Henry.

<sup>20</sup> Warren, *Facing Death* and Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus* endorse Lucretius's reply, and insist that because of not being able to experience being deprived of goods by death one cannot really "suffer" or undergo deprivations because of death.

<sup>21</sup> Nagel, "Death," 64–67.

<sup>22</sup> Fuller discussion of these different principles of value and their implications are in Rosenbaum, "Appraising Death."

<sup>23</sup> Representative of the extensive literature on posthumous harm are Pitcher, "Misfortunes of the Dead" (following Feinberg, *Moral Limits of the Criminal Law*); Levenbook, "Harming Someone," "Harming the Dead," and "Welfare and Harm"; Marquis, "Harming the Dead"; Callahan, "On Harming the Dead"; Rosenbaum, "The Harm of Killing"; Glannon, "Persons, Lives, and Posthumous Harms"; Luper, "Posthumous Harm" and *Philosophy of Death*; Taylor, "The Myth of Posthumous Harm" and "Harming the Dead"; Portmore, "Desire Fulfilment and Posthumous Harm"; Belshaw, *Annihilation*; and Scarre, "The Vulnerability of the Dead."

<sup>24</sup> Silverstein, "The Evil of Death" advocates a somewhat different metaphysical view, which enables him to maintain that while "values connect with feelings" (a principle of value closely associated with Epicurus's) those who are dead coexist with events occurring after their deaths. With this idea, he argues that events occurring after death are not nothing to the one who dies. Also see Silverstein, "The Evil of Death Revisited" and "The Evil of Death One More Time."

<sup>25</sup> Philodemus appreciated the point in his *On Death* 36.27–30: "for the man who lived badly, even if all men of later times surmise that he has lived blessedly, it is impossible to conceive [how] he will have obtained any relief from his wretched life."

<sup>26</sup> For fuller discussion of this idea and its implications, and for other objections, see Rosenbaum, "Appraising Death." Some of the arguments for abstract valuation, including Nagel's, are discussed in Rosenbaum, "Appraising Death," 159–64. The abstract notion of value may be useful in some contexts, but it is compatible with Epicurus's concept of value and how he uses it in his overall ethics.

<sup>27</sup> See Rosenbaum, "Appraising Death," 152–54, for a discussion of the relationship between Aristotle's view of death, *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.6 (1115a), and Epicurus's.

<sup>28</sup> McMahan, "Death and the Value of Life," 235. McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, 95–98 briefly expresses this concern as a conclusive objection, but neither explains nor justifies it.

<sup>29</sup> See *KD* 31–38 and the general discussion of Epicurus's view of justice in Rosenbaum, "Epicurean Moral Theory." Also see Armstrong, "Epicurean Justice."

<sup>30</sup> Porphyry *On Abstinence* 1.7.1–9.4 (quoting Hermarchus), Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. See the further discussion of justice in *On Abstinence*, 1.10.1–12.7.

<sup>31</sup> For a fuller discussion of this objection and ideas associated with it, see Rosenbaum, "Concepts of Value," 161–65.

<sup>32</sup> See Silverstein, "The Evil of Death" for further description of such comparisons. McMahan, "Death and the Value of Life," 235 ff. takes this idea to challenge the Epicurean view.

<sup>33</sup> Consider Philodemus's remark in n. 25.

<sup>34</sup> The nature of the values we employ here is not as important as realizing that what we are valuing are statements included in someone's life narrative, propositions which might not entail concrete effects on someone. The values could consist in esthetic preferences or customary social values.

<sup>35</sup> See Rosenbaum, "Appraising Death."

<sup>36</sup> Epicurus's early followers such as Lucretius and Philodemus expressed more expansive ideas about the fear of death, and I shall come to some of their ideas in due course.

<sup>37</sup> For a circumspect and extensive discussion of the therapeutic nature of philosophy in the Hellenistic world, see Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, especially ch. 1, “Therapeutic Arguments.” See also Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, especially ch. 4, “Therapeutic Tactics.”

<sup>38</sup> See Warren, *Facing Death*, especially “Fears of Death.”

<sup>39</sup> *Ep. Men.*; *KD* 1; *Ep. Hdt.*

<sup>40</sup> See Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, 244–48.

<sup>41</sup> Pseudo-Plato *Axiochus* 365d; Sen. *Ep.* 77; Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 1.37.90; Plut. *Consolatio ad uxorem* 610d and *Consolatio ad Apollonion* 109f; Montaigne, “That to Philosophize Is to Learn to Die,” 65; Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* 2.466 ff.; Hume, as reported in Boswell’s “An Account of My Last Interview with David Hume, Esq.,” in *Private Papers of James Boswell*.

<sup>42</sup> Lucr. *DRN* 3.832–42 (trans. Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*).

<sup>43</sup> Lucr. *DRN* 3.972–77 (trans. Rouse and Smith).

<sup>44</sup> Nagel, “Death”; Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*; Kamm, “Why Is Death Bad?”; Rosenbaum, “The Symmetry Argument”; Segal, *Lucretius on Death and Anxiety*; Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*; Glannon, “Temporal Asymmetry, Life, and Death”; Belshaw, “Asymmetry and Non-existence” and “Later Death/Earlier Birth”; Kaufman, “Death and Deprivation” and “Pre-vital and Post-mortem Non-existence”; Warren, “Lucretius, Symmetry Arguments, and Fearing Death” and *Facing Death*; see Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus* for a small selection of items on different interpretations, critical treatments and additional bibliography.

<sup>45</sup> Adam Smith made in the eighteenth century the same psychological point, using a slightly different example, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I.i.1.13. It may in some sense be difficult or impossible to use one’s imagination while trying to imagine that one’s imagination or consciousness is gone and inactive.

<sup>46</sup> *KD* 4: “Pain does not last continuously in the flesh: when acute it is there for a very short time, while pain which just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh does not persist for many days; and chronic illnesses contain an excess of pleasure in the flesh over pain.”

<sup>47</sup> *Ep. Hdt.*; Cicero *Fin.* 1.17.

<sup>48</sup> The nature of prematurity is clearly problematic. Is dying prematurely dying before one wants; dying before one is finished with certain usually time-extensive projects; dying before what is normal; dying before one has achieved happiness? What is it? See comments about the Epicurean conception of a complete life, following.

<sup>49</sup> *KD* 19–21.

<sup>50</sup> This is especially problematic in the context of modern notions of pleasure that follow Bentham and Mill, and in the context of interpreting Epicurus’s proto-utilitarian concept of justice. Epicurus’s hedonism is discussed in Tsouna’s Chapter in this volume. See Rosenbaum’s discussion of pleasure and justice in “Epicurean Moral Theory.”

<sup>51</sup> See Furley, “*Nothing to Us?*”; Mitsis, “Epicurus on Death and the Duration of Life”; Rosenbaum, “Epicurus on Pleasure and the Complete Life”; Warren, *Facing Death*; Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*; Lesses, “Happiness, Completeness, and Indifference.”

<sup>52</sup> The view of life depends heavily on understanding and accepting Epicurus’s unusual hedonism, which is poorly understood, largely because of scant evidence. It also depends on realizing, as Epicurus thought, that varying episodes of kinetic pleasure might be enjoyable, but cannot make life happier. See *Ep. Hdt.*

<sup>53</sup> Nussbaum has an illuminating description of this view in her *Therapy of Desire*, especially 204–12. She thinks that the fear of death (affiliated with death’s prematurity) “is a fear that, right now, our hopes and projects are vain and empty” (207). See Furley, “*Nothing to Us?*,” esp. 89–90; and Striker, “Commentary on Mitsis.”

<sup>54</sup> *Ep. Men.*

<sup>55</sup> See Rosenbaum, "Epicurus on Pleasure and the Complete Life," 23–25.

<sup>56</sup> For more extensive discussion of how Epicureans treated various fears associated with death, see Philodemus *On Death*; Lucr. *DRN* 3; Warren, *Facing Death*; Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, Ch. 10.

<sup>57</sup> See n. 23 for various sources on the issue.

<sup>58</sup> Socrates argued to his jury that their sentence was insignificant, partly on the ground that if there is no afterlife, then death is annihilation and the dead have no consciousness and cannot suffer. Plato *Apology* 40d–e.

<sup>59</sup> For a fuller account of this issue see Rosenbaum, "Death as a Punishment."

<sup>60</sup> For one example of the attempt to base the wrongness of killing on the badness of death for people, see McMahan's refined 2002 account, *The Ethics of Killing*. He assumes without argument that death is bad for people and uses that assumption as a partial basis for his explanation. If Epicurus is correct about death, I do not see how McMahan's view could be correct. Luper, *Philosophy of Death* offers a somewhat different account, which would nevertheless also be incompatible with Epicurean thinking.

<sup>61</sup> For an expanded account of issues that might be involved in rethinking the wrongness of killing, see Rosenbaum, "Concepts of Value."

<sup>62</sup> Kai Draper recently argued that the loss or deprivation of goods because of death is more properly an object of disappointment than of fear. Draper, "Epicurus on the Value of Death," 79.

## CHAPTER 7

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# HEDONISM

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VOULA TSOUNA

IN the spirit of the myth related by Prodicus,<sup>1</sup> Greek and Roman philosophers often assume that human beings are confronted with a fundamental moral choice, between the narrow path of Virtue and the broad path of Pleasure, and they give reasons why one should prefer the former alternative over the latter. And while many of them, including Plato and Aristotle, ascribe some conditional value to pleasure, they decisively reject hedonism, i.e., the view that pleasure is or ought to be the only intrinsic good and hence the *telos* or ultimate goal for man. The arguments for and against hedonism rehearsed in Plato's dialogues<sup>2</sup> and in Aristotle's ethics and rhetoric,<sup>3</sup> as well as the slim evidence concerning the fanatical anti-hedonism of Antisthenes and of the earlier Cynics and the more moderate attitudes of other Socratic schools, establish that pleasure was a major topic of debate in the classical and post-classical eras and that hedonism was viewed as an ethical theory to be seriously reckoned with. For, in addition to the fact that hedonism could be taken to be implicit in common practices and in the kind of social and political attitudes illustrated by the Platonic Callicles in the *Gorgias*, it also found philosophical expression both within the Academy and near the core of the Socratic circle.

According to Aristotle, Eudoxus defended pleasure as the good on the grounds that every animal desires, most of all, to obtain pleasure but avoid pain, seeks pleasure for its own sake rather than for the sake of something else, and treats every other good as having greater value when pleasure is added to it (*NE* 10.2). In corroboration of his hedonism, he also remarked that, although pleasure is a good, it is never praised as such; this he took to be an indication of the fact that pleasure is superior to other praiseworthy things, in the sense that it constitutes a point of reference for assessing their value (*NE* 1.12). However, more intriguing and probably more influential was the hedonism of the Cyrenaics, a school founded by Aristippus of Cyrene, a regular member of Socrates's entourage whose lifestyle gave rise to the impression that he was a hedonist.<sup>4</sup> His grandson and third head of the school, Aristippus the Younger (born around 380/370 BCE), developed a distinctive sort of hedonism commonly called presentist hedonism, which was endorsed with modifications by most Cyrenaics of the Hellenistic period as well. According to this doctrine, the body has greater importance than the soul; the pleasure that is of supreme positive value is *bodily* pleasure;<sup>5</sup> every bodily or mental pleasure is related to a *kinēsis*, i.e., some sort of alteration or motion (*DL* 2.90). Moreover, pleasure can be experienced only in the present: it is *monochronos*, unitemporal (Athenaeus *Deipn.* 12.544a–b),<sup>6</sup> and does not comprise either the memory of past enjoyments or the expectation of future ones.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, bodily pain is of supreme negative value and, presumably, it too is confined in the present: neither the remembrance of past pains nor the fear of future ones has genuine moral import. More than any other element of the Cyrenaic doctrine, the primarily physical nature of the *telos* and its presentist character are responsible for the bad reputation of Aristippus and his followers as profligates who also provide theoretical justification for the pleasures of the many. By concentrating their criticisms mainly on those two features, Epicurus and his followers aim to show the conceptual and ethical advantage of Epicurean hedonism over its Cyrenaic counterpart and to make clear the points of difference between the two doctrines.

Despite Epicurus's professed rusticity (*DL* 10.5), and despite his notoriously critical attitude towards Socrates and his heirs, his account of pleasure indicates that he took seriously the challenges raised by the Socratic, Platonic, and Aristotelian traditions and, moreover, that he formed

his hedonism in deliberate contrast to the presentism of Aristippus the Younger and in response to the Cyrenaic philosopher Anniceris. Democritus's ideal of cheerful tranquility and the suggestion that it can be explained in physical terms by reference to the orderly arrangement and motion of atoms also appear to have exercised an influence on Epicurus's conception of the good. The same holds, more generally, for Epicurus's choice to reject the providentialist creationism associated with the Socratic tradition and, notably, with Plato and the Stoics, and to develop instead a modified version of atomic physics entailing a thoroughly mechanistic view of the universe and its contents. Not only do the extant fragments of Epicurus and his followers offer detailed materialistic explanations of physical phenomena, but they also account for the atomic constitution and functions of the human soul. Thus they convey a reasonably clear idea of the far-ranging implications of atomism and of the extent to which it constitutes the basis of the Epicurean doctrine of pleasure. Also crucially pertinent to the development of this latter are some basic tenets of Epicurean epistemology and scientific method: the self-evident character and veridicality of all *aisthēseis*, sense-perceptions; the elevated status of sense-perceptions, preconceptions, and feelings as the fundamental criteria of truth; the school's empiricist outlook;<sup>8</sup> and the methods by which theoretical claims, including ethical tenets, get confirmed or refuted.<sup>9</sup>

While the present study will not discuss this rich and complex background of Epicurean hedonism systematically and in detail, nonetheless, it will refer to aspects of Epicurus's interactions with rival doctrines whenever this seems philosophically necessary or relevant. Also, an effort will be made to use evidence from relatively unexplored sources, in particular Philodemus (c. 110 BCE–c. 40s or early 30s BCE) and Diogenes of Oenoanda (second–third century CE), as well as from Epicurus, his early associates and, to a lesser extent, Lucretius.<sup>10</sup> The expansion of the evidential basis of the discussion will help, I hope, to emphasize more than usual the distinctive nature of Epicurean hedonism, its originality and sophistication, and its enduring core as well as its peripheral developments over time.

The first section introduces Epicurus's conception of the moral end and revisits a controversial argument bearing on his theory of motivation. The second discusses a centrally important feature of Epicurean hedonism, namely, a certain sort of hedonistic calculus, and indicates how it is



defended by different members of the school. The third turns to Epicurus's conceptual amplification and defense of his hedonism. It centers primarily on the distinctions between bodily and mental pleasures and between kinetic and katastematic pleasure. Also, this section addresses Epicurus's concept of the limit of pleasure, his notoriously controversial claim that the removal of pain is the highest pleasure, the pleasures of memory and anticipation, and, more generally, the respective roles of the body and the mind in the achievement of the supreme good. The fourth section studies Epicurus's classification of desires and its ethical implications, as well as the elimination of virtue from the sphere of the supreme good but also its uniquely important role in the rational pursuit of pleasure.<sup>11</sup> To conclude, the final section briefly considers some of the criticisms rehearsed by Cicero against Epicurean hedonism and discusses whether the Epicureans have sufficient resources to respond to them.

At the outset, it is useful to entertain the following remarks concerning the nature of the theory under examination, as well as the sources that will be used in this study. In the first place, hedonism ancient and modern can assume many forms, which depend on the particular notion of pleasure used by each philosopher or school, and also on the corresponding interpretation of the central claim that pleasure is the good. Despite their substantial differences, however, hedonistic systems have been commonly charged with undermining many traditional values and advocating the maximal satisfaction of one's desires and the achievement of maximal pleasure, especially sensualist pleasure. Epicurus and his followers were criticized along those lines by contemporary and later authors, who willfully represent the hedonism of the school as one more theory recommending physical indulgence and a sybaritic lifestyle. Thus, one task set before us is, on the one hand, to examine how Epicurus qualifies the concept of pleasure precisely in order to avoid this sort of accusation and, on the other hand, to explore whether there might be some basis for it. Obviously, this is a crucial issue, for it bears on the philosophical attractiveness and viability of Epicurean hedonism.

Second, the ambiguities surrounding the practical implications of Epicurean hedonism and other ethical topics may be due to the fact that Epicurus left certain matters under-determined, or, alternatively, they may be caused by the fragmentary state of the evidence. Of Epicurus's extant works concerning ethics, the only complete text is the summary exposition

in the *Letter to Menoeceus*, whereas the rest of the surviving passages consist of maxims, aphorisms, and fragments detached from their context. Also fragmentary is the evidence about the other early authorities of the school as well as many of their successors including, notably, Zeno of Sidon. Lucretius's poem *On the Nature of Things* appears to follow Epicurus's writings closely and also, I believe, reflects later developments of the doctrine. However, since philosophical content and poetic form are inextricably linked, the poem does not offer the sort of rigorous exposition and defense of hedonism that may be found in a straightforward philosophical treatise. Lucretius's near contemporary, Philodemus, is a prolific author who composes his treatises in fairly traditional form. But although the excavations at Herculaneum brought to light several papyri containing works by him, nonetheless, the extant portions of these are only a fraction of Philodemus's work, and the carbonized papyri containing them are often difficult to read and interpret. Comparable problems occur in respect of the fragmentary exposition of Epicurean ethics found in the remnants of the monumental inscription dedicated by Diogenes of Oenoanda to his native city for the salvation of humanity. The account of Epicurean hedonism below makes selective use of all these texts. But although it is based on a broad range of texts, we ought to remain aware of its open-ended and tentative character. Some of the claims defended here may well require revision in the future, if fresh evidence is discovered in sources inaccessible to us at present.<sup>12</sup>

Third, a comment is in order regarding the presentation and criticism of Epicurean ethics in Cicero's *De finibus*. The rhetorical and dialectical structure of that work, as well as its adversarial tone, should not cloud the fact that the exposition of Torquatus, the Epicurean spokesman, is careful and thorough, and Cicero's philosophical rhetoric (cf. 2.17) raises genuine philosophical problems for Epicurus's hedonism.<sup>13</sup> Although caution is necessary in dealing with Cicero's testimony, this testimony must not be put aside.<sup>14</sup> For in addition to the fact that it is consistent with the extant fragments of the Founder and of other members of the school, it is probable that Cicero largely reproduces Epicurus's own exposition of his ethical system.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, he expands and clarifies various aspects of Epicurus's doctrine on the basis of reliable contemporary sources, which have endorsed, I believe, the interpretation of Epicurean hedonism advanced by

the school of Athens, and in particular by Zeno of Sidon.<sup>16</sup> For all these reasons, I intend to take seriously into account the discussion of Epicurean hedonism in both *De finibus* Books 1 and 2 and other relevant Ciceronian texts.

## PLEASURE AS THE MORAL END

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We may as well begin with Epicurus's own words (*Ep. Men.* 129):

This is why we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we know it to be a good which is primary and akin (*prōton kai syngenikon*). From it we derive every choice and avoidance and to it we come back, judging every good thing by the feeling (*pathos*) which we use as a yardstick.

According to Epicurus, then, pleasure has priority over every other good. This does not only, or not necessarily, mean that it is the first thing that we encounter in our lives. According to Torquatus, who says that he remains faithful to Epicurus's way of teaching (*Fin.* 1.29), Epicurus designated pleasure as the *telos*, supreme or sovereign good, in the sense in which all philosophers agree that something is a *telos*: namely, all other goods must refer to it, whereas it does not refer to anything else. Epicurus's further claim that pleasure is akin (*syngenikon*) and connatural (*symphyton*) points to its special affinity to our own nature. Because it has a nature congenial to us (cf. *physin oikeian*, *Ep. Men.* 129), every pleasure is in itself a good. Moreover, by virtue of that affinity, pleasure is closely related to physical and mental health (e.g. *Ep. Men.* 128). The opposite holds for pain: it is most alien to our nature and, therefore, every pain in itself is an evil and tends to destroy our constitution.

Epicurus's assertion that the *pathos* of pleasure is used as the standard for all choice and avoidance indicates that he has in mind, specifically, his own followers and not mankind in general. For only the Epicureans recognize pleasure as the first and congenial good, and only they employ the corresponding *pathos* as their sole ethical criterion. In fact, since feelings belong, together with sense-perceptions and preconceptions, to the Epicurean criteria of truth (Epicurus, *Ep. Hdt.* 82, DL 10.31), the judgments derived from the feeling of pleasure must be true judgments. And the

corresponding decisions regarding things to choose or avoid must be good decisions, i.e. conducive to pleasure. Epicurus drives no sharp wedge between truth and value. Criterial beliefs about the moral value of things have objective truth, just as criterial beliefs about the physical nature of things do.<sup>17</sup> And, in the former case, the feeling of pleasure serves as the ultimate arbiter of moral truth, while it is not itself subject to any higher authority. Like other criteria, it is self-evident (*enargēs*) and indemonstrable. These features characterize the feeling of pain as well.<sup>18</sup>

Epicurus's doctrine that the greatest good is pleasure and the greatest evil pain is supported by an argument that came to be known as the Cradle Argument. While it is not explicitly advanced in the Founder's surviving texts, a version of it probably played a part in his treatise *On the Moral End*,<sup>19</sup> and different formulations are also found in other secondary sources. To convey a sense of the issues at stake, let us look at Torquatus's use of that argument and examine the main interpretative options available to us.

According to the Epicurean spokesman in the *De finibus*, Epicurus sets about establishing his thesis that pleasure is the highest good but pain the greatest evil in the following manner (*Fin.* 1.29–30):

Every living being, as soon as it is born, seeks pleasure and enjoys it as the sovereign good, while it shuns pain as the sovereign evil and avoids it as far as possible. This it does at a time when it is not yet corrupted, on the pure and impartial judgment of nature itself. Hence he denies that there is any need to prove or dispute why pleasure should be pursued and pain avoided. He thinks that these matters are felt as fire is felt to be hot, snow to be white, and honey sweet. None of these things needs to be confirmed by elaborate arguments; it is enough simply to point them out.

Epicurus's description of pleasure as the first and connatural good could be taken to allude to a similar line of reasoning (*Ep. Men.* 129): the fact that the primary feelings determining the behavior of all newborn creatures are pleasure and pain somehow supports the thesis that these ought to be the goals of our choices or avoidances.

However, the relation between the description of the psychological hedonism of infants<sup>20</sup> and the ethical hedonism proposed by Epicurus is far from clear. In fact, attempts have been made to exonerate Epicurus and his followers of the charge of committing the naturalistic fallacy: inferring that we, mature adults, ought to pursue pleasure and avoid pain from the empirical observation that infants in the cradle do, in fact, seek the former

but shun the latter. On one view,<sup>21</sup> the commonplace assertion that infants are naturally and primarily attracted to pleasure<sup>22</sup> is not intended to serve as a basis for the identification of pleasure with the sovereign good, which is argued for by Epicurus on independent grounds. Rather, it is contended, the appeal to cradles provides an argument for the purely “natural” character of pleasure, which can be ascertained at a time when the child’s nature is not yet depraved by society and culture. In other words, observation of small children in the cradle is not necessary to justify the value of pleasure as the sole ethical criterion; but it is necessary in order to authenticate the natural origins of the *pathos* of pleasure as felt by the adult.

On another view,<sup>23</sup> the Cradle Argument plays no role in Epicurus’s theory of moral motivation because, in fact, Epicurus does not espouse psychological hedonism, since he allows for sources of motivation different from the pleasure or pain of an action or of its consequences. In particular, Epicureans are motivated also by friendship, which they take to be an intrinsic good, and this entails that one acts on occasion without being in sole pursuit of one’s own pleasure. Also, as has been forcefully argued,<sup>24</sup> every passage deemed to be relevant to psychological hedonism concerns, in truth, the motivation of “we” Epicureans, not “we” human beings in general. Assuming that this is the case, the conclusion has been drawn that the Epicureans came to have the psychological tendency to pursue pleasure as a result of their ethical hedonism.<sup>25</sup>

However, critics of this latter view retort that the passages referring to psychological hedonism cannot all be attributed to the Epicureans alone but, more frequently than not, generally refer to the tendency towards pleasure that all living beings have as a matter of psychological fact.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, it has plausibly been objected that Epicurus’s assumption that people learn to be motivated by considerations other than pleasure or pain does not preclude psychological hedonism. For it may still be true that the considerations motivating us, ultimately, can be traced back to these primary feelings. Alternatively, if they cannot be traced back to these feelings, ethical hedonism must be abandoned together with psychological hedonism.<sup>27</sup> Evidence concerning the relation between the descriptive claim of psychological hedonism and the normative thesis of ethical hedonism casts doubt on the former line of interpretation, described above, as well. For, on the one hand, Torquatus’s version of the Cradle Argument appears

compatible with the contention that the description of early animal behavior is not intended to serve as the basis for ethical hedonism. According to his exposition, what follows from the premise that all newborn creatures do seek pleasure and shun pain is *not* the normative conclusion that pleasure ought to be sought and pain avoided. Rather, Torquatus infers that the normative thesis does not need to be demonstrated: since pleasure and pain are experiences, it suffices merely to point them out.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, however, several texts present the descriptive claim as the grounds from which ethical hedonism is inferred. For instance, according to Diogenes Laertius, Epicurus uses that claim as a proof (*apodeixis*) that pleasure is the goal (DL 10.137). Also, according to Sextus Empiricus, the Epicureans suppose themselves to have proved (*deiknynai*) that pleasure is naturally choiceworthy on the strength of the premise that newborn and unperturbed animals pursue it and move away from pain (P 3.194).<sup>29</sup>

In the light of such evidence, a different line of interpretation seems to me preferable. Namely, the force of the normative inference that we ought to pursue pleasure and avoid pain is intended to be derived, precisely, from the statement that all animals, when still uncorrupted, do seek the one but avoid the other.<sup>30</sup> One may readily object that, if this is the structure of the argument, then Epicurus or his followers fall prey to the naturalistic fallacy. The answer that can be provided has a long history stretching back to Plato and his successors, including the hedonist Eudoxus: the idea is that nature has normative meaning, so that what nature propels us to seek is also the good thing to seek. If this is the case, the empirical generalization concerning living beings and, in particular, human beings in the cradle can be considered adequate grounds for inferring what sort of final goal we ought to set for ourselves as mature adults.

In sum, we cannot be certain as to the exact way in which Epicurus intended the Cradle Argument to be understood, and he may well have left that matter undetermined. But, judging from the available evidence, I am inclined to think that some of his later followers if not Epicurus himself held that psychological hedonism actually *entails* ethical hedonism.<sup>31</sup> If it is psychologically impossible to pursue as the ultimate good anything other than pleasure, then there is nothing other than pleasure that one actually *ought* to pursue. Any other normative theory of choice and action would be bound to have no real object; it would be *empty* in just that sense.



## THE SO-CALLED HEDONISTIC CALCULUS

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According to Torquatus, while Epicurus relies on the self-evident character of the feeling of pleasure and does not see any need to argue for the thesis that pleasure ought to be pursued and pain avoided, some members of the school choose to support the self-evident goodness of pleasure by pointing out that it constitutes a natural preconception rooted in the mind and, therefore, can be infallibly grasped by both sensation and reason. Yet another group of Epicureans, to which Torquatus also claims to belong, believes that the fundamental contention of Epicurean ethics must be defended by argument against rival ethical theories (*Fin.* 1.31). There is no doubt that each of these groups justified its stance by appealing to the writings of Epicurus.<sup>32</sup> This is precisely what Torquatus does, when he promises to explain the mistake of those who blame pleasure and praise pain by quoting arguments from the Founder himself (*Fin.* 1.32):

No one rejects or dislikes or avoids pleasure itself because it is pleasure, but because greater pains ensue for those who are ignorant of how to pursue pleasure in a rational manner. Nor again is there anyone who loves, seeks, or wants to have pain itself because it is pain, but rather because there are conditions enabling one to achieve some great pleasure by hardship and pain.

What is going on, then, in cases of painful actions which might appear to be chosen for the sake of things other than pleasure is that, in fact, they are chosen for the sake of *greater* pleasure resulting from them. The moral exemplars earlier extolled by the character Cicero are supposed to be explicable in that way.

While laymen reason in that way without being fully aware that they do so, Epicurus and all his followers are fully conscious of the importance of the so-called hedonistic calculus,<sup>33</sup> which they view as the hallmark of their ethics. Speaking on behalf of himself and his followers,<sup>34</sup> Epicurus describes their way of making hedonistic choices as follows (*Ep. Men.* 129–30):

Because pleasure is the primary and connatural good, for this reason we do not choose every pleasure, but we sometimes pass over many pleasures when greater difficulties for us would result from them. And we consider many pains preferable to pleasures whenever greater pleasure follows for us after we have endured many pains for quite some time. So, while



every pleasure is a good because it is naturally congenial (to us), not every pleasure is choiceworthy. And likewise, although every pain is evil, not every pain is by nature to be avoided. But we have to judge all this by relative calculation (*symmetrēsei*) and survey of advantages and disadvantages. For, on some occasions, we treat the good as bad and, conversely, the bad as good.

In sum, while everybody makes decisions with the aim of getting greater pleasure in the end, only the followers of Epicurus regularly and successfully assess the long-term implications of their actions (*KD* 8, *SV* 73) under the guidance of “this famous discoverer of the truth and architect, as it were, of the happy life” (*Fin.* 1.32). Diogenes of Oenoanda expresses this idea in more concrete and practical terms. In fr. 34 (Smith),<sup>35</sup> he concludes his argument to the effect that pleasure is the supreme good by exhorting us to reject the sophistical arguments (*τοὺς σοφιστικοὺς λόγους*: 2.7–8), which advocate the thoughtless hedonism of the many (*[οἱ πολλοί]*: 3.13–14),<sup>36</sup> but apply instead the rational calculation of pleasures and pains (*[λογισμῷ χρῆσθαι]*: 3.14–4.1).<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Diogenes argues, the application of the calculus presupposes the acceptance that we shall not always be immediately successful in our efforts. Contrary to what some “sophists” suggest, however, we ought to persevere, enduring pains when this is needed in order to achieve greater pleasure in the end (Smith fr. 34 2.4–5.1):

Thus, I say, where the danger is great, so also is the fruit. Here we must turn aside these sophistical arguments, because they are insidious and offensive, and have been contrived on the basis of terminological ambiguity to [lead astray] us miserable humans . . . . [Do let us] not [avoid every pain that is present nor choose every pleasure as the many always do. For each person must employ reasoning], since he [will not always achieve immediate success: just as] exertion [often] involves one [gain at the beginning and] certain [others as time unfolds], so it is also with [the experience of pleasure]. For sowing seeds does [not] bring [the same benefit] to the sower, [but we observe] some of the seeds [very quickly] germinating and [bearing fruit but others taking longer] . . .

It is worth noting, however, that some doubts appear to have been raised within the Epicurean school regarding the degree and manner in which the calculus bears on ethical choice. According to the surviving part of Philodemus’s treatise *On Choices and Avoidances*,<sup>38</sup> certain “rustic” Epicureans contended that the right choices are not effected through the calculus, but rather result *directly* from the application of the cardinal principles of the system (*kyriōtata*). In sharp contrast, the “urbane” or

“sophisticated” followers of Epicurus, who presumably include Philodemus and his mentor Zeno of Sidon, have a correct understanding of the teachings of the Founder, according to whom the right choices and avoidances are dictated by the hedonistic calculus and only *indirectly* depend on the cardinal principles. These last determine the values according to which the calculus is performed, and the calculus in its turn determines the specific choices that we, Epicureans, make (Indelli and Tsouna-McKirahan *De elect.* 11.7–20).

Evidently, Epicurus and his followers regularly relied on the calculus in order to address the aforementioned charge that they advocate excessive physical indulgence and follow a profligate lifestyle.<sup>39</sup> The same accusation was targeted at the Cyrenaics as well. In fact, the enemies of ancient hedonism tend either to disregard the differences between the two schools or to play them against one another.<sup>40</sup> Their willful misunderstandings are especially blatant with regard to the presence or absence of the hedonistic calculus.

As mentioned, the orthodox Cyrenaics headed by Aristippus the Younger espoused a sort of hedonic presentism which entailed that one ought to aim at present pleasure and, foremost, bodily pleasure, whereas the experiences of the past or the anticipated pleasures of the future have no moral relevance whatsoever. Happiness is nothing but the aggregate of individual pleasures and, as many Cyrenaics including Hegesias point out, there are far too many impediments to its attainment. To the heedless pursuit of pleasure by the Cyrenaics, Epicurus and his followers oppose the rational calculation of long-term pleasure recommended by their own school. On the one hand, immediate pleasure can have an overwhelming power and can be considered choiceworthy merely because of its compelling force (*Fin.* 1.33). On the other hand, people steeped in the doctrine of Epicurus have the intellectual and psychological equipment to resist the immediate attractions of present pleasure, if the hedonistic calculus suggests to them that they should do so. As a result of that attitude, they have a moderate and self-sufficient mode of life, sharply different from the sybaritic lifestyle associated with the Cyrenaics, which enables them both to enjoy pleasure freely and to react appropriately to external constraints (*Ep. Men.* 130–32). While we shall return later, we should now consider two passages from late Epicurean authors, which draw a contrast

between the Cyrenaics and the Epicureans regarding, precisely, the performance of the calculus.

In his treatise *On Choices and Avoidances*, Philodemus sketches out various sceptical views, all of which deny the possibility of rationally evaluating one's actions and integrating one's experiences in a rational life-plan.<sup>41</sup> In the first place, he uses as his premise the Cyrenaic epistemological claim that we can apprehend only our own *pathē*, and what he takes to be the corresponding ethical claim, i.e. that our moral decisions are dictated by our *pathē*, in order to infer that the subjectivism and sensationalism of the Cyrenaics have anti-rationalistic implications (*De elect.* 2.5–12). If the only things we can know are our *pathē*, we have no grounds for preferring one of them over another as a guide to action. Instead, we act impulsively, by attending to the *pathē* of the body or the mind (2.11–12), without being in a position to provide a rational explanation for our choices. Also, exploring further the links between Cyrenaic scepticism and a conception of action according to which action is guided by *pathē*, not by rational considerations, he argues as follows: since the Cyrenaics postulate the *pathē* as the moral ends<sup>42</sup> and the sole criteria of action, they feel entitled to use *any* means to pleasure and do not hold themselves accountable for their own choices. To put it differently, Philodemus suggests that, because the Cyrenaics are sceptics, they adopt a subjectivist and presentist criterion of action; and because the latter is of that sort, it entails a crude hedonism according to which the agent's choices are deemed incorrigible and do not involve long-term assessments of value (3.6–14).<sup>43</sup> The context indicates that Philodemus brings the Cyrenaics back to life for an important dialectical purpose: to show that, in virtue of the hedonistic calculus, Epicurean ethics is far superior to the hedonistic presentism theorized by the Cyrenaics and followed unreflectively by the many. Philodemus pursues this goal in a manner both original and effective, pointing to the anti-rationalist implications of Cyrenaic hedonism and contrasting this last with Epicurus's highly rational approach to action, whose principles are summarized in the surviving columns of Philodemus's treatise. Diogenes of Oenoanda also compares and contrasts the two schools on similar grounds.<sup>44</sup>

Before moving on, we should pause to reflect on the defining features of Epicurean hedonism sketched out above. We may call them naturalism and

rationalism. The former consists in the psychological tendency of all living beings, including humans, to seek pleasure and avoid pain, and it constitutes the basis entailing the ethical hedonism of the Epicurean school. The latter manifests itself above all in our rational capacity to assess the value of present pleasure in respect of its long-term consequences and judge correctly what to choose and what to avoid with a view to greater pleasure. If the natural tendency towards pleasure has much to do with the body and its needs, our capacity to perform the calculus is a matter of our mind. Body and mind, animality and rationality, are both aspects of our constitution and jointly determine the pursuit of the moral goal. How they do so will become clearer in the next section.

## EPICURUS'S ELABORATION AND DEFENSE OF HEDONISM

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Epicurus and his followers assess the contributions of the body and of the mind to the achievement of pleasure by considering the different natures of bodily and mental experiences as well as the relations holding between these two categories. On the one hand, like the Cyrenaics and unlike Plato's Socrates, Epicurus gives some sort of primacy to bodily experiences and the concern with the well-being of the flesh (*[e]usarkia*: Philodemus, *De Epic.*, *P.Herc.* 1232 17.15). He states, controversially as we shall see, that when life has been stripped of physical pleasures as well as of the hopes or memories of them, we have no reason to wish to remain alive (*P.Herc.* 1232 18.10–17). Furthermore, he is reported to have claimed that the root of all good lies in the pleasures of the stomach (Athenaeus *Deipn.* 546 ff.), and that the satisfaction of “the cry of the flesh” so as not to be hungry or thirsty or cold makes one as happy as Zeus (SV 33). In a similar direction, Zeno of Sidon urges us to concentrate on physical pleasures or “on pleasures which, on account of the body, find their place in memory or anticipation” (Angeli and Colaizzo fr. 8). Weaker variants of the same view underlie also Philodemus's suggestion that we should endeavor to preserve our good health (*De elect.* 23.3–12) and his repudiation of moral vices partly on the grounds that they cause a great deal of bodily suffering.<sup>45</sup> The fundamental character of bodily pleasure is also illustrated by the Epicurean use of the

pig as a positive symbol for human beings.<sup>46</sup> For although that lowly animal cannot experience happiness, which can only be experienced by humans, nonetheless it illustrates a sort of basic contentment related to plain physical pleasure, that animals as well as humans are able to enjoy.

On the other hand, in apparently deliberate contrast<sup>47</sup> to the orthodox Cyrenaics, who privilege bodily pleasures over mental ones, Epicurus argues that mental pleasures are far greater and more influential with regard to the overall quality of one's life. For bodily experiences are restricted to the present, whereas mental ones extend also over the past and the future (*Fin.* 1.55, DL 10.137). Also, the intensity of our experiences can be immensely increased by beliefs, especially future-directed ones, concerning the value of their intentional objects. Pain becomes more acute if we believe that it will result in some great evil for us and, correspondingly, pleasure is greater if we believe that there is no reason for apprehension and fear (*Fin.* 1.55). In Torquatus's words (1.56):

It is therefore clear that maximal pleasure or distress of the mind contributes more to a happy or miserable life than a bodily pleasure or pain of equal duration.

Diogenes adds another argument to the same effect, drawing a sharp contrast between the Epicurean and the Cyrenaic positions concerning the primacy of mental or psychic pleasure (fr. 49 cols I.12-II.17):

Our nature [requires what] is better for [our] soul. And the soul has clearly more [capacities] than the body. For it [has] control of the extreme and supremacy over the other *pathē*, as indeed we also claimed it to have [above]. [Therefore if], paying attention to the arguments of Aristippus, on the one hand, we take care of the body [by choosing] all the pleasures deriving from drink, food, and sexual acts and, in general, all things that no longer [give pleasure after they have been enjoyed but, on the other hand, neglect the soul, we shall deprive ourselves of the greatest pleasures].

Although, in this passage, Diogenes does not formally defend the contention that the primacy of psychic pleasure has a naturalistic backing, nonetheless he lends support to it by stressing the superior capabilities of the soul and its control over physical affects. In doing so, he perfectly aligns himself with Epicurus, but also enriches the thesis of the Founder by adding something new to the doctrine.

As we shall see in more detail in the final section, the Epicurean position described above is not free of tensions. The primacy that Epicurus attributes

to bodily pleasure may well appear incompatible with the dominance of psychic experiences over physical ones. It is probably for that reason that several Epicureans ended up rejecting the bodily origin of all mental pleasure and, therefore, were branded as heretical (cf. *Fin.* 1.55). Furthermore, while mental experiences have greater scope and intensity than the corresponding bodily ones, their effects are not invariably benign. For, on the one hand, the mind does have the power to counterbalance even the most severe physical sufferings by summoning memories of past pleasures. This is illustrated in a compelling manner by Epicurus's letter to Idomeneus, written "in the last and most blessed day" of his life, in which he attests that the joy that he feels at the remembrance of their past conversations offsets the excruciating physical pains that he suffers (DL 10.22). On the other hand, however, the mind can also magnify bodily pain or overcome present pleasure by entertaining false beliefs about value. In this latter sense, the mind has a downside, whereas the body has none.<sup>48</sup>

In any case, it is important to observe that Epicurus and his school both acknowledge the fundamental character of physical experience and emphasize the moral dimensions of human rationality. The successful performance of the hedonistic calculus presupposes that we take into account, precisely, the very different ways in which our physical nature and our mental equipment each contribute to the achievement of pleasure. This observation is particularly important for the effective application of Epicurean moral therapy.<sup>49</sup>

Another distinction introduced by the Epicureans has a strikingly innovative character and paramount ethical importance: pleasure can be either kinetic, in which case it is associated with some sort of motion (*kinēsis*) causing an agreeable stirring, or, alternatively, katastematic or static pleasure, which is characterized by the complete absence of pain. These aspects of pleasure will be further examined below, but we should register up front that the Epicureans are the first school known to maintain each and all of the following: there is nothing intermediate between pleasure and pain; the absence of pain is pleasure; this latter is a stable condition rather than some process or activity; and it is the highest good.

Although the authenticity of the distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasure is disputed,<sup>50</sup> there are good reasons to believe that the twofold concept of pleasure was introduced into the system by the

Founder himself. In his work *On Choices*, he states his position as follows (DL 10.136):

Freedom from disturbance (*ataraxia*) and freedom from physical pain (*aponia*) are katastematic pleasures; but joy (*chara*) and delight (*euphrosynē*) are viewed as kinetic activities.

Moreover, he is attested to have used the above distinction in his ethical treatise *On the End*, the first book of *On Ways of Life*, and the letter to his friends in Mytilene. The *Letter to Menoeceus* does not employ the terms “kinetic” or “katastematic” but, all the same, I think that it clearly implies a distinction between, on the one hand, the pleasures deriving from the satisfaction of desires and, on the other hand, bodily painlessness and psychic freedom from disturbance. For this latter “is the end belonging to the blessed life” and the ultimate goal of our actions (*Ep. Men.* 128). Moreover, several *Key Doctrines* appear to imply the distinction under discussion (*KD* 3, 10, 18–21), and the same holds for certain *Vatican Sayings* as well (*SV* 33, 51, 59, 81).

Epicurus’s critics do not tire of repeating that his twofold notion of pleasure is both psychologically counterintuitive and theoretically problematic. I shall return to this point, but for the time being we should briefly consider the dialectical and philosophical factors that may have motivated Epicurus to draw it. Not only is it likely that he reacts to Plato, who appears to favor the view that pleasure is a restorative process associated with some sort of *kinēsis*, and possibly to Aristotle, who determines pleasure in terms of a certain type of activity. Also, according to both ancient and modern interpreters, Epicurus shaped the keystone of his hedonism in such a manner as to set it in opposition to the concept of pleasure on which Cyrenaic hedonism is based, i.e., in Epicurus’s terms, kinetic pleasure (cf. *SE, M* 7.199). In particular, his radical move to call the absence of pain pleasure, indeed the highest pleasure, and therefore preclude the existence of any category of experiences other than pleasure and pain, appears intended to counter the view of Aristippus the Younger. According to this latter, there are three conditions of the human constitution, i.e., pleasure, pain, and an intermediate condition comparable to a calm sea (Aristocles ap. Euseb. *Prep. ev.* 14.18.32). And, correspondingly, there are three types of experiences: *pathē* of pleasure, *pathē* of pain, and intermediate *pathē*. Aristippus the Younger and his



followers believe that this intermediate group of affectively neutral experiences have no moral value and that the only experiences that do have moral value are those resulting from motions titillating the senses; the Cyrenaics have been depicted as advocates of licentiousness on just that count (Athenaeus *Deipn.* 544e). On the contrary, by giving utmost ethical importance to the states of *aponia* and *ataraxia*, Epicurus probably intended, among other things, to make his own brand of hedonism immune to the charge of profligacy.

The fact that Metrodorus too states that pleasure can be conceived as both kinetic and katastematic (*On Timocrates*: cf. DL 10.136) constitutes evidence that, already during the first generation of Epicurus's followers, the twofold concept of pleasure became part of the orthodox Epicurean dogma. As such it is subsequently endorsed by every known member of the school. For instance, it underlies Lucretius's approach to the passions and his therapeutic techniques. It is used by Philodemus in his analyses of emotions and vices and in his portrayal of the Epicurean ideal.<sup>51</sup> And it is asserted by Torquatus in the core of his exposition of Epicurean ethics (*Fin.* 1.37):

We do not simply pursue the sort of pleasure which stirs our nature with its sweetness and produces agreeable sensations in us. Rather, the pleasure we deem greatest is that which is felt when all pain is removed. For when we are freed from pain, we take delight in that very liberation and release from all that is distressing.

Diogenes too evokes the distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasure on numerous occasions, including the surviving part of his polemics against the presentist hedonism of the Cyrenaics, whose sects, however, had disappeared from the philosophical stage long before Diogenes's time (fr. 34.6.2–14):

Now we should investigate how our life will become pleasant in both the states (*ἐν τοῖς καταστάμασι*) and the actions (*ἐν ταῖς πράξεσιν*). And let us first discuss the states, keeping an eye on the point that, when the emotions which disturb the soul are removed, those which produce pleasure enter into it to take their place.

If, as the context suggests, Diogenes intends to make an anti-Cyrenaic point, it is probably this: he contrasts the Epicurean agenda of investigating how to achieve lifelong pleasure *in both states and actions* with the Cyrenaics' indifference to lifelong pleasure and, specifically, their exclusive

interest in pleasurable actions but not in pleasurable states. Assuming that his reference to *καταστήματα* (katastēmata) points to katastematic pleasure,<sup>52</sup> he probably invites his readers to compare the Cyrenaics' single-minded pursuit of actions aiming at immediate kinetic pleasures with the Epicureans' concern for both short-term kinetic pleasures and stable conditions equivalent to katastematic pleasure.<sup>53</sup>

To acquire a better understanding of the distinction between katastematic and kinetic pleasure and of the interpretative problems surrounding it, let us dwell a little longer on some of the issues mentioned above. On what basis does Epicurus differentiate katastematic from kinetic pleasures? How are these two sorts or aspects of pleasure related to bodily and mental pleasures, the restoration of needs and, generally, the fulfillment of desires? In what way are the kinetic pleasures related to the katastematic state and what is their respective moral value? And, finally, what are the implications of Epicurus's view that painlessness of the body and the undisturbed state of the mind constitute the highest good?

In my view, Epicurus's main criterion for distinguishing between kinetic and katastematic pleasures is that the former involve some sort of motion of which we are aware, whereas the latter do not. The motions in question have to do with processes oriented towards the satisfaction of all sorts of desires. To corroborate the accusation that Epicurus and his followers were after kinetic pleasures, Athenaeus cites a much maligned excerpt from *On the Moral End*, in which Epicurus is taken to extol the kinetic pleasures deriving from food, sex, hearing, and "the pleasant motions produced on the sense of sight by a beautiful form" (Athenaeus *Deipn.* 12.546e). Likewise, Torquatus describes kinetic pleasure as a sort of pleasure "moving" our nature in a delightful manner (*Fin.* 1.37); Cicero confirms that, in the treatise *On the Moral End*, Epicurus claims that kinetic pleasures result from *suaves motiones*, sweet or pleasant motions, produced through the eyes and through the other senses in the whole human being (*Tusc.* 3.41).

However, the evidence regarding the *sorts* of pleasures that qualify as kinetic or katastematic is more ambiguous. Epicurus's claim that he could not conceive of the good without reference to bodily pleasures associated with motions (*Deipn.* 12.546e), and also the fact that he usually illustrates kinetic pleasures by giving examples of sensory pleasures (including esthetic ones), could be taken to indicate that all kinetic pleasures are physical. Nonetheless, in *On Choices*, Epicurus refers to kinetic pleasures

that are not physical but psychic: *chara* and *euphrosynē*, joy and delight (DL 10.136). Hence, kinetic pleasures can be either of the soul or of the body. The same holds for katastematic pleasure: “*aponia*” typically refers to painlessness in the body, whereas “*ataraxia*” indicates the absence of pain or disturbance in the mind (DL 10.136). To summarize, the distinction between katastematic and kinetic pleasure cuts across the one between pleasures of the body or of the mind. What makes a pleasure kinetic or katastematic is not its physical or mental character, but rather the presence or absence of the relevant stirring and of the sort of feeling that results from this latter.<sup>54</sup>

As indicated, contrary to the Cyrenaics, the Epicureans ascribe genuine value to the pleasures of recollection and anticipation as well as to those experienced in the present. Obviously, those pleasures belong to the mind, not the body, and they are kinetic in so far as they involve the mind’s movement to bring to the fore experiences of the past or to project itself towards the future. According to a widespread view, the pleasures remembered or hoped for are always kinetic, because Epicurus maintains that the mind feels joy when it has the expectation of tasteful food, sex, music, and other sensory experiences (*Tusc.* 3.41). Also, on the same view, the pleasures that we anticipate are always kinetic as well: we are looking forward to the processes or activities that will stir our senses or mind in an agreeable manner. However, I submit that katastematic pleasure too can be the object of anticipation and probably of memory as well (Plut. *Non posse* 1089d):

For the stable condition (*katastēma*) of the flesh and the reliable expectation concerning it (sc. the *katastēma*) contain the highest and most secure joy for those who are able to reach it by reasoning.

This excerpt from *On the Moral End* implies that, in fact, the confident anticipation of the katastematic state is morally more important than the expectation of kinetic pleasures arousing the senses. This is as it should be, since bodily painlessness and psychic tranquility have supreme moral value.

Whether kinetic pleasures are restorative, i.e., derive from the satisfaction of desires and the fulfillment of bodily needs, is under debate. According to one sort of approach, the motions involved in kinetic pleasure are always associated with mental desire-satisfaction or physical replenishment, e.g., quenching one’s thirst or satisfying one’s hunger (*Fin.*

2.9; SV 33), whereas, according to another, kinetic pleasures are distinct and different from replenishment processes.<sup>55</sup> All things considered, it seems to me that, although many kinetic pleasures result from replenishment processes, not all of them do. In the first place, consider someone not entirely free of physical want, or mental anxiety, or both. Even though one's primary desire will be oriented towards removing the pain and hence will probably be restorative, nonetheless that same person is likely simultaneously to feel desires for other things as well, which are not related to the source of one's dominant need at that time. For instance, while the pleasure of eating will address one's hunger, the pleasure of admiring at the same time the arrangement of flowers on the table does not replenish anything at all. In the second place, we should consider the nature of the pleasures that one experiences when one is in a *katastematic* state. As indicated, these experiences may be bodily or mental: a person in a state of static pleasure can be both enjoying the sunshine by the beach and feeling joy or delight (cf. DL 10.136). Insofar as such pleasures involve motions, they qualify as kinetic.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, they are not restorative,<sup>57</sup> for the condition of *katastematic* pleasure does not lack anything that needs to be restored. In fact, Epicurus suggests that, while the pleasures deriving from replenishment can be viewed as steps leading to painlessness, the pleasures experienced when one is in this latter state are variations of it. "Pleasure does not increase in the flesh, once the pain due to deprivation is removed; simply, it varies (*poikilletai*)" (*KD* 18 part; also *Fin.* 2.10).<sup>58</sup> Such variations determine the particular texture, as it were, of one's *katastematic* condition. Philosophically, there is nothing problematic about the idea that kinetic pleasures can be of different sorts and fulfill different functions. For assuming that they are related to desires, and given that the nature and sources of desires vary, it is reasonable to suppose that kinetic pleasures will also vary in corresponding ways.

In contrast to the transient character of kinetic pleasures, there is nothing precarious about *katastematic* pleasure. As indicated, Epicurus and his followers conceive of it as a *katastēma*, a stable physical or mental condition enduring as long as one remains entirely unaffected by pain. As I said, the matter is controversial, but I am inclined to think that, according to Epicurus, *katastematic* pleasure of the body results, at least in part, from kinetic processes of replenishment (SV 33):

The cry of the flesh is not to be hungry or thirsty or cold. For whoever has these things and hopes to preserve them could rival even Zeus in happiness.

Katastematic pleasure of the mind, however, principally depends on detecting the deepest sources of fear and anxiety and on treating them by Epicurean moral therapy. We shall revisit this topic but, at present, it is important to note that painlessness of the body and tranquility of the mind are interconnected and crucially depend upon each other. On the one hand, the serenity of a mind free of disturbance is both intrinsically pleasurable and instrumentally essential to the successful management of physical suffering. On the other hand, even though the mind can overcome the latter, nonetheless the static condition of physical painlessness is far preferable to that of bodily suffering successfully offset by the operations of the mind. For *aponia* enables us to enjoy all sorts of pleasures and strengthens our confidence that we shall keep doing so in the future (cf. *Tusc.* 3.41). Comparably to Plato's Socrates but for reasons radically different from his own, the Epicureans recommend that one should take diligent care of one's health and should try to preserve one's body in good condition (Philodemus *De elect.* 23.7–9).

Importantly, according to Epicurus and the other members of his school, the katastematic condition, whether of the mind or of the body, constitutes the very limit of pleasure (*KD* 3; cf. Diog. fr. 34 lower margin):

The limit of the magnitude of pleasures is the removal of all pain. Wherever pleasure is present, for as long as it is present, there is no pain of the body or distress of the mind or both of them together.

Epicurus justifies his claim concerning the limit of pleasure by pointing to our physiological make-up: recall his claim that the flesh cannot experience pleasure greater than the removal of pain (*KD* 18). However, only the mind is in a position to grasp that fact, by reflecting on the nature of pleasure (*KD* 18) and by rationally assessing “the goal and limit of the flesh” in the light of the correct conception of a complete life (*KD* 20). The flesh, on the other hand, does not have the capacity to understand that the removal of all suffering marks the quantitative limit of pleasure. Therefore, it treats this latter as if it were infinite (*KD* 20).

Later Epicureans appeal to the limit of pleasure in order to explore the question whether the temporal duration of one's life has moral significance.

Philodemus argues that, contrary to the empty beliefs of the many, the good cannot be measured by time nor is the structure and completeness of one's life affected by the longer or shorter length of one's life (*De mort.* 12.1–15). Most people believe that a longer life is a more pleasant life and that its greater pleasantness consists in a greater number of accumulated pleasures. Consequently they always aim for future pleasures in a self-defeating effort to possess more goods.<sup>59</sup> However, as Philodemus notes, the Epicureans realize that one needs very little time to achieve pleasure (3.32–36) and that the pleasure quickly achieved in a very short time is equal to the pleasure provided by infinite time (3.37–39). Philosophical wisdom entails that we are able to grasp the limit of pleasure and understand that the temporal duration of a life should not be the criterion of its completeness and happiness.<sup>60</sup> Arguably, this is compatible with the view that a longer life is likely to contain a greater number of pleasures than a shorter life, and that we have some good reasons to prefer the former to the latter (13.36–14.14).<sup>61</sup> We shall revisit this latter issue in the last section of the paper.

Epicurus and his adherents mostly take katastematic pleasure to be identical with happiness and often speak of this latter as the overall goal of human life (e.g., *Ep. Men.* 128; *KD* 33).

However, it would be a mistake to think that kinetic pleasures lie outside the scope of the moral end, or that they are merely means to the removal of pain. On the contrary, they are integrated in the Epicurean *telos* in the ways defended above, i.e., as variations of or steps towards katastematic pleasure. It is important to stress that, even though the kinetic pleasures related to the restoration of physical needs can plausibly be described in terms of steps aiming to the katastematic condition, all kinetic pleasures are *intrinsic* goods. But they are not always choiceworthy, whereas katastematic pleasure invariably is. And, moreover, kinetic pleasures are dependent on the katastematic condition in ways in which this latter does not depend on them.

One might object that the katastematic state takes on its pleasurable quality in virtue of the kinetic pleasures related to it and, in that sense, its value derives from these latter, but that, if considered on its own, it cannot plausibly be described as pleasure, let alone as the highest pleasure. Anniceris, a Cyrenaic philosopher interacting with Epicurus, put this point bluntly, by comparing katastematic pleasure to the condition of a corpse

(DL 2.89). Judging from the surviving texts, however, Epicurus and his followers do not seem particularly disturbed by this sort of objection. We can only speculate why, but I think their reasons partly bear on the analogy between painlessness and health. When we are healthy, we have a feeling of well-being that accompanies everything we do; but we still feel well even if we do nothing. Epicurus appears to view *aponia* and *ataraxia* as conditions whose formal requirements coincide with the formal requirements of *eudaimonia*, happiness, and whose positive character makes them apt to be used as rules of ethical conduct.<sup>62</sup> And he suggests that the absence of pain in the body and of disturbance in the mind has its own experiential quality, which is distinct from whatever feelings of pleasure accompany the kinetic variations of the katastematic state. Despite what Anniceris and other critics say, freedom from pain is not an affectively neutral state nor a condition of which one remains unconscious. In truth, as Epicurus and his followers appear to believe, it feels quite wonderful.<sup>63</sup> An intriguing passage from Diogenes Laertius deserves separate comment (DL 10.121):

We should think of happiness in two ways: as the highest, which god enjoys, and which is incapable of increase; and <as the happiness which is capable of><sup>64</sup> addition and subtraction of pleasures.

On one possible reading, certain late Epicureans explicitly included in their notion of happiness kinetic pleasures as well, possibly in order to forestall the Academic criticism that Epicurean pleasure has two facets, but only one of them is claimed to be the highest good. On another possible interpretation, however, both ways of thinking about happiness have to do with katastematic pleasure: in the former case, it is ideally perfect and complete, whereas in the latter it admits of degrees reflecting the varied circumstances of the human condition. Philodemus's suggestion that Epicureans suffering an untimely death may have gained happiness without, however, having reached its upper limit (*De mort.* 19.1–2) points in the direction of this latter interpretation.

Epicurus's treatment of katastematic pleasure as an equivalent of happiness, and his contention that a life free of pain is equal to the life of the gods, place him squarely within the tradition of ethical eudaemonism that most Greek moralists belong to, with the possible exception of the Cyrenaics.<sup>65</sup> At the outset of his surviving *epitomē* on ethics, he explicitly



underscores that fact. Having urged everyone, young or old, to undertake the study of Epicurean philosophy, he concludes (*Ep. Men.* 122):

It is therefore necessary that we rehearse the things that produce happiness (*eudaimonia*), seeing that when happiness is present we have everything, whereas when it is absent we do everything in order to acquire it.

Moreover, in the *Letter to Mother*, he describes himself as making progress towards the achievement of happiness, acquiring something useful day by day and getting closer to a state equal to that of the gods (Diogenes, fr. 112.23–40; cf. *Ep. Men.* 135; *KD* 33). Of course, what he means is not that he expects to become immortal, but that the assimilation of Epicurean philosophy renders one capable of “feeling joy as the gods do for as long as we live” (fr. 112.38–40). We should appreciate that the godlike character of Epicurean happiness crucially has to do with the long-term stability and anti-maximalist orientation of katastematic pleasure, and with the mind’s dominant role in the achievement of this latter.

Once again, the contrast with Cyrenaic hedonism appears deliberate and, as ancient authors observe, could not have been more marked.<sup>66</sup> For Cyrenaic pleasure is inherently unstable and locked into the present. Happiness depends on the accretion of pleasurable episodes (Aristocles ap. Euseb. *Prep. Ev.* 14.18.31) and is precarious (DL 2.91).<sup>67</sup> And the mind has no overall control of the day-to-day pursuit of pleasure and no contribution to make by remembering or anticipating pleasures, because such pleasures are metaphysically non-existent<sup>68</sup> and morally valueless. Moreover, although Cyrenaic presentism does not preclude future planning<sup>69</sup> and happiness is considered in principle possible, nonetheless happiness cannot be pleurably experienced *as a whole*. If it has a value, it is derivative and reducible to the value of its pleasurable constituents, while there are also several experiences in one’s lifespan that are value-neutral.<sup>70</sup>

To summarize, Cyrenaic hedonism entails a fragmentary conception of happiness, which does matter but only derivatively so, and also a deep anti-rationalism duly criticized by the school’s rivals (Philodemus *De elect.* 2.5–3.18). In sharp contrast, the Epicureans’ aspiration to godlike bliss relies, as it were, on a holistic conception of happiness as a dynamic condition of painlessness and tranquility, sustained and enriched by different sorts of kinetic pleasures, and firmly governed by the cognitive operations of the

mind. The significance of that contrast is not merely historical. Both Epicurean authors, such as Philodemus and Diogenes, and their critics, especially the academics Cicero and Plutarch, realize that the parallel between the ethics of the two schools has major philosophical import, which we are invited to entertain and assess.<sup>71</sup>

## THE EPICUREAN CLASSIFICATION OF DESIRES AND THE STATUS OF THE VIRTUES

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Given that the rational calculus lies at the heart of Epicurean eudemonism, it is especially important to understand the nature of the desires and beliefs motivating one's hedonistic choices. In a broad sense, this enterprise falls under the study of nature (*physiologia*), since this latter comprises not only the atomic structure of the world but also the nature of humans. Epicurus classifies the desires into natural and necessary, natural and not necessary, and neither natural nor necessary or empty (*kenai*), and he contends that, of the necessary desires some are necessary for happiness (*eudaimonia*), others for the removal of annoyance in the body (*aochlēsia*), and others for life itself (*auto to zēn*) (DL 10.127–28; see also *KD* 29).<sup>72</sup> His idea, endorsed by all his known followers, is that the evaluative beliefs related to our desires are necessarily or contingently true or, in the case of empty desires, they are both false and harmful. And the corresponding pleasures should be chosen or avoided depending on whether they derive from the satisfaction of natural desires, which are the only ones we should seek to fulfill, or from empty ones, which should never receive satisfaction.

Later Epicureans reinterpret Epicurus's classification using current analytic tools. They are motivated probably by a criticism of Academic origin, according to which Epicurus's taxonomy confuses species with genera and does not realize that there are two categories of desire instead of three (*Fin.* 2.9.26). Probably in reaction to that criticism, Philodemus divides desires into two genera, natural and non-natural or empty, and then subdivides the former into two subcategories, necessary and not necessary (Philodemus *De elect.* 6.7–21).<sup>73</sup> He adds that the sources of our desires differ, as do the ways in which we experience them: they spring from our

individual nature or from external factors, and they can have a strong or a weaker impact on us (6.5–20):

[We called] different causes those causes some of which, it seems, produce terrible storms while others do not, some occur prematurely due to certain defects, others happen because of the perceptions of joy, some are produced by habits whereas others are produced independently from them, some occur having originated from ourselves while others arise because of external factors, or because things which become desirable by our lack of them inflicted [a sort of] wound by the very thought of them.

Failure to understand such distinctions causes us to mistake alien desires for those congenial to our nature and to pursue ambition or luxury as we should not (*De elect.* 5.4–21). In keeping with the rationalism of the Founder, Philodemus develops the authoritative dogma of the school in new directions: he identifies the desires underlying vices or passions such as flattery, arrogance, envy, and greed, explains their negative value, and proposes ways in which they can be modified or uprooted. Also, both he and Lucretius expand Epicurus's doctrine by exploring in depth the sorts of desires related to our deepest fears, and especially the fears addressed in the first two articles of the fourfold medicine concerning the gods and death. Some of the most pertinent and attractive elements of Epicureanism are found in their discussion of these topics.

The two following remarks bear on the background of the Epicurean classification of desires and their use for polemical purposes. First, although Epicurus is widely believed to be the first to propose a taxonomy of desires and pleasures, in fact, there are precedents in Plato, which Epicurus probably knew and took into account. In the context of his analysis of defective constitutions in *Republic* 8, Socrates distinguishes the desires into necessary and not necessary, money-making (*chrēmatistikai*) and money-spending (*analōtikai*), relatively better and relatively worse (*Rep.* 558d).<sup>74</sup> Necessary desires are those that are unavoidable or whose satisfaction is considered compelling and beneficial to us (558e), whereas not necessary are the desires that can be avoided by discipline from youth up or whose satisfaction does no good or actual harm (559a). An example of the former is the appetite for basic nourishment such as bread, which is beneficial and, if it fails, we die, whereas the excessive appetite for other kinds of foods can be avoided by proper training and is mostly harmful to both the body and the soul (559b). While both the oligarchic and the democratic man are

governed by the appetitive part of the soul which dominates the rational part, the former type of man satisfies only his necessary desires because of his avarice and love of profit (554a), whereas the latter gives himself away to the not necessary appetites, because of lack of education (cf. *apaideusia*), idleness, and softness with regard to pleasure and pain (556c).

Moreover, while both types of citizen experience internal conflict, the necessary desires governing the oligarchic man by force do still ensure a minimum of order, whereas the not necessary, money-spending appetites seizing the citadel of the democratic man's soul (560b) overthrow every order. They remove all correct beliefs and attitudes, encourage a licentious life (561c) that the democratic man calls "the life of pleasure and freedom and happiness" (561d), and, eventually, lead to the necessity of tyranny. Interestingly for our purposes, Socrates describes the democratic citizen as "day-by-day indulging the appetite of the moment, now getting drunk and abandoning himself to the sounds of the flute, then again drinking only water and following a strict diet, at one time taking physical exercise but at another idling and neglecting everything, and sometimes pretending to occupy himself with philosophy" (561c–d). Although Epicurus's distinction between necessary and not necessary desires does not exactly coincide with Plato's, this latter may well have been a source of inspiration for the founder of the Epicurean school. Like Plato's Socrates, Epicurus determines necessary desires as unavoidable, beneficial, and bearing on one's physical sustenance, while his conception of empty desires corresponds quite closely to the not necessary, money-spending desires of the democratic man: they involve the wrong values, imply psychic disorder, and dictate an erratic and profligate lifestyle dictated by presentist attitudes, i.e., the heedless pursuit of day-to-day pleasure.

Second, it is not accidental, I think, that these very elements occur in the Epicureans' criticisms of Cyrenaic hedonism as well. Not only does Epicurus appear to target this latter by denouncing profligacy (DL 131–32),<sup>75</sup> rejecting maximalism, and relating both to empty beliefs; Philodemus too highlights the connections between vain desires, empty beliefs, and the hedonic presentism associated with the Cyrenaics, and he criticizes different Cyrenaic sects for advocating an anti-rationalist and amoral pursuit of day-to-day pleasure (*De elect.* 2.5–3.18). Moreover, he remarks that such *carpe diem* attitudes are typically caused by superstitious beliefs and fears. People whose rationality is thus impeded seek only the things that provide

immediate pleasure and refuse to endure any pains (17.1–3), just as the Cyrenaics urge us to do. Diogenes raises similar points and adds new elements as well. Like earlier members of his school, he treats the Cyrenaics as the theoretical defenders of the crude day-to-day hedonism of the many (e.g., fr. 44 and 49) and he alludes to the empty desires and beliefs underlying their presentism. For instance, having mentioned that it is the soul rather than the body that is responsible for the pain caused by empty desires (1.1–2.4), Diogenes says that he feels sadness at the conduct of those who waste their lives in the vain pursuit of theatres and baths and perfumes and ointments, and he contrasts these empty pleasures to the genuine joy generated from the study of Epicurean physics (fr. 2.3.7–14). Both the passage’s reference to sensual pleasures typically restricted to the present and the explicit comparison between these latter and the pleasures deriving from *physiologia* indicate that Diogenes is thinking of the Cyrenaics: they reject the study of nature as useless but indulge desires which are empty and harmful; the Epicureans, on the other hand, base their desires on a thorough understanding of nature and therefore pursue only beneficial pleasures. He makes a comparable point with regard to the desires related to the pleasures of memory and anticipation: the Cyrenaics reject them, whereas the adherents to his own school believe that the pleasures of anticipation can relieve present pain or increase present pleasure in so far as they are connected to natural desires and not to empty ones. Elsewhere, Diogenes refers to empty desires as “desires that [outrun] the limits fixed by nature” (fr. 34.7.5–7) and must be eradicated because they are “the roots of all evils” (fr. 34.7.10–12). On the other hand, natural desires “seek after as many things as [are necessary] for our nature’s delight” (fr. 153.1.9–14).

It is difficult to overestimate how important it is to understand the nature of desire, when it comes to the diagnosis and treatment of the vices and the passions. For both these kinds of traits entail empty desires as well as empty beliefs, and both make it impossible to achieve painlessness and peace of mind. The Epicurean analysis and therapy of the passions are among the most valuable contributions of the school to posterity,<sup>76</sup> and they will be discussed in detail in other chapters of this volume. Here, suffice it to recall that the Epicurean agenda of moral therapy is outlined in the so-called fourfold medicine (*tetrapharmakos*), whose origins can be traced back to

the Founder and whose articles are the following (Philodemus, *Ad [...] 4.9–14*):

God gives no cause for fear, death no cause for alarm; it is easy to procure what is good, and also to endure what is bad.

For present purposes, the last two items require brief comment.

The contention that pleasure is easily available draws support from Epicurus's theses concerning the limit of pleasure and the twofold nature of the highest good. Painlessness is all that matters for happiness, whereas wealth, power, or other externals are not essential for that goal (*KD* 15; *SV* 33, 59). Also, the third article of the *tetrapharmakos* gains plausibility in the light of Epicurus's remark that natural wealth is both limited and easy to get, whereas the wealth that is desirable because of empty opinions is unlimited and hard to come by (*KD* 15). Metrodorus holds a similar view, and so does Philodemus. In his treatise *On Property Management*, this latter largely remains faithful to the idea that very little is needed in order to gain pleasure. However, he adds that, although the Epicurean manager knows that nothing important depends on possession of great wealth because nature makes readily available everything necessary for the satisfaction of our natural desires, nonetheless "he feels more inclined by his will to a more affluent way of living" (*Oec.* 16.4–6). Hence, it is rational to prefer greater wealth, provided that it is administered according to the principles of Epicurean philosophy.

On the other hand, Diogenes appears to take a harder line with regard to the possession of riches (fr. 153.2.5–14):

What [need to mention the] fabulous treasures of Croesus and his gold ingots or the rivers running with gold for his sake? What [benefit], father Zeus, [did he derive] from these [riches]?

Croesus drew no benefit, either because wealth is deemed by Diogenes totally irrelevant to pleasure or, alternatively, because Croesus did not have the proper attitude towards it. A final comment concerns the last principle of the fourfold medicine, that the bad is easy to endure. Epicurus defends that principle by contending that pain is either severe but short or long but tolerable (*KD* 4). As mentioned, other texts appeal to the capacity of the mind to control physical pain by recollecting or anticipating pleasurable

experiences. Yet others suggest that, even though pain is evil and it is natural to shun it, nonetheless its intensity depends on the nature of our beliefs and desires: empty beliefs and desires can greatly increase physical pain to the point of rendering it excruciating, whereas the absence of such beliefs and desires allows pain to be psychologically manageable.

In sum, the last two principles of the fourfold medicine importantly bear on the doxastic and appetitive elements governing our pursuit of the highest good and avoidance of the greatest evil. They involve naturalistic assumptions concerning the availability of natural goods and our physical and psychological reactions to pain. And they reflect Epicurus's optimism as well as the sort of rationalism that pervades his ethics.

This latter marks also another aspect of Epicurean hedonism, namely, the Epicureans' conception of the virtues and their relation to pleasure. Epicurus's approach to the virtues is moderately cognitivist: he views them as inner states importantly consisting of beliefs, and explains them by reference to their cognitive components. In the *Letter to Menoeceus*, immediately after he has emphasized that pleasure can be ensured only through sober reasoning investigating the causes and removing false beliefs (131–32), he states his view about the virtues as follows (*Ep. Men.* 132):

*Phronēsis*, prudence, is the source of all these and the greatest good. Therefore, prudence, from which arise all the other virtues, is more precious even than philosophy, for it teaches us that it is not possible to live pleasurably without living prudently and honorably and justly, (nor is it possible to live prudently and honorably and justly) without living pleasurably. For the virtues grow together with the pleasurable life and the pleasurable life cannot be separated from them.

According to the above passage, then, the virtues have a unique and exclusive relation to the life of pleasure. They mutually entail each other (*KD* 5),<sup>77</sup> and they form some sort of unity: they grow together with each other and with pleasure, and none of them can be found in the soul without the others. Both the indispensability of the virtues and the elevation of *phronēsis* into a value greater than philosophy itself might appear to sit uneasily with Epicurean hedonism. For thus the virtues might appear to compete with pleasure for the position of the supreme good. In particular, *phronēsis* might seem to have value independently of pleasure, as it should not in a system that posits pleasure as the only intrinsic good.<sup>78</sup>



Further reflection on the texts, however, renders it clear that Epicurus and his adherents ultimately determine the value of the virtues in instrumental terms. According to the passage cited above, prudence is the source and the greatest good pertaining to the rational pursuit of katastematic pleasure,<sup>79</sup> precisely because it teaches us (*didaskousa*) that the virtues are the sole unfailingly effective means to pleasure and, therefore, we have every good reason to acquire and practise them (*Ep. Men.* 132). The instrumental status of prudence is also compatible with Epicurus's claim that "of all the goods provided by prudence with an aim to the blessedness of life as a whole by far the greatest is friendship" (*KD* 27). While prudence serves to secure important goods contributing to happiness and the pleasurable life, there is no implication that it is valuable for its own sake. The same holds for justice, whose concept is empirical and contractual and whose value lies solely in the huge benefits that it brings to human societies (*KD* 32–40). Torquatus makes the point in a straightforward manner: *sapientia*, practical wisdom, which is identical with the art of living, is desirable merely because it is the artificer of pleasure (*Fin.* 1.42): it roots out our errors, rids us of our fears and empty appetites, removes distress, and guides us to live within the bounds of nature (1.43–46). Temperance and courage also are valued as privileged means to pleasure, not in their own right (1.47–49). Moreover, justice consists in an agreement between fellow-citizens neither to harm others nor to be harmed (1.50–53). Its precise character is determined by social factors and its enforcement is choiceworthy only so long as it proves beneficial. So, the virtues are eliminated as candidates for the position of the supreme good, and pleasure remains the only victor in the field. Torquatus duly concludes that only pleasure is attractive to us in virtue of its own nature, and that a life of happiness is nothing other than a life of pleasure (1.54). Philodemus does not face the same challenges that Cicero's Epicurean spokesman is presented as facing. Therefore, he does not feel the need to defend the instrumental status of the virtues, but rather takes it for granted and shifts his attention to both the advantages of virtue and the disadvantages of vice. And although he keeps up with the times by introducing new virtues into the Epicurean canon, such as magnanimity, philanthropy, and the disposition to make friends (*De elect.* 14.1–14), nonetheless he follows the tradition of his school by exploring both the

cognitive and the extra-cognitive aspects of the virtues and by stressing the need to cultivate them.<sup>80</sup>

Diogenes adds to our understanding of Epicurean virtue by addressing the topic in a polemical context in fr. 33 (including NF 128). Assuming that his unnamed opponents in that fragment are the Cyrenaics,<sup>81</sup> he indicates how the Cyrenaic position concerning the instrumentality of virtue differs from the view of his own school and why the former is mistaken:

Even if these people (sc. the Cyrenaics and whoever else shares their attitude towards virtue) agree that, as a matter of fact, pleasure is inseparable from the virtues... (1.11–14)<sup>82</sup>... [Prospective pleasure], as these people lay it down for all human beings like a snare, has the power to draw them like birds or fish open-mouthed to the names of the virtues, and sometimes enters people's minds and paints all kinds of illusory pictures of itself, and the poor wretches are not ashamed [of bestowing favors on] each other, [and charming people by their wit], [in pursuit of their own eventual] pleasure, agreeing adroitly [also to face dangers] in order to avoid pain, like those who endure marching out to war and those who endure crag-climbing (3.7–14 + 4 = NF 128.1 + fr. 33.5 = NF 128.2.2).<sup>83</sup> Therefore, I want to deflect also the error that, along with the feeling of self-love, has you in its grip which, more than any other, further inflates your doctrine as [ignorant]. It is this: [not] all causes in things precede in time their effects, even if the majority do, but rather some of them precede in time their effects, others [are simultaneous] with them, and other temporally follow them (5 = NF 128.2.2, fr. 33.6.3).

The rest of the fragment gives examples of each category of causes (6.4–8.6) and concludes (8.7–15):

Therefore you, being unable to draw these distinctions and not realizing that the virtues have their place among the causes that are simultaneous with their effects—for [they] are borne along [with pleasure—go entirely astray].

To fill in the argument sketched above, on the one hand, the Cyrenaics endorse a sort of consequentialist hedonism, which can plausibly be taken to entail that they view the virtues as bothersome means of securing the satisfaction of bodily desires and needs. Moreover, so far as psychic pleasures are concerned, they view virtuous activity but also friendship as tiresome, though the wise man may choose them for the sake of their pleasant consequences. On the other hand, Epicurus contends that virtue and pleasure are interrelated and inseparable (*Ep. Men.* 132), so that the exercise of the virtues for the sake of pleasure is itself a pleasant act.<sup>84</sup> Besides, not only is virtue practiced at the same time as the pleasure resulting from that practice, but also it clears the ground for future pleasures

which, we should recall, are integral aspects of the Epicurean *telos*. Virtue makes such future pleasures possible.

On the above interpretation, in fr. 33 (including NF 128), Diogenes proceeds to accuse the Cyrenaics of failing to understand what sort of cause of pleasure virtue is: they believe, mistakenly, that virtue is a sort of cause that *precedes* its effects in the way in which cautery and surgery precede the restoration of health (6.4–11). In fact, however, virtue is a kind of cause that temporally *coincides* with its pleasurable outcome.<sup>85</sup> If a hedonist holds, as Diogenes accuses the Cyrenaics of holding, that pleasure has only antecedent causes, then he must exclude the pleasures of anticipation, as indeed the Cyrenaics do. If, on the other hand, a hedonist *also* recognizes simultaneous as well as a posteriori causes, then he has the conceptual room both to view virtue as intrinsically pleasant and to value present experiences whose causes lie in the future. Of course, this is precisely what Epicurus recommends, and Diogenes's polemics are intended to show why the Epicurean position is far preferable to the brutal instrumentalism entailed by Cyrenaic hedonism.

In the end, Epicurus and his followers reject the choice of Hercules narrated by Prodicus. They choose the path of pleasure but also of virtue. They uphold hedonism and also propose a way of reconciling the pursuit of pleasure with the observance of traditional moral norms. What principally enables them to combine these two elements are, I submit, their view that painlessness of the body and tranquility of the mind constitute the highest pleasure, and the rigorous rationalism of their ethical doctrine. Their belief that the good is naturally easy to get also lends support to the idea that the pleasurable life and the virtuous life can coincide. The same holds for the Epicureans' conception of the virtues as the only proper and effective means to Epicurean pleasure. Consequently, Epicurus and his followers feel entitled to claim that their hedonism does not advocate luxurious extravagance, as its critics contend. On the contrary, it is compatible with and conducive to a respectable, sober, and rather frugal lifestyle. Nowhere is the effort to combine the egoistic bend of Epicurean hedonism with the values prized by conventional morality more evident than in the school's attitudes towards friendship. For present purposes, it is enough to mention Epicurus's notorious claims that the sage will love his friend as much as himself (*Fin.* 1.67–68), and that he will sometimes die for his friend (DL 10.121), which appear to be in tension with the idea that the supreme goal

consists in the attainment of one's own pleasure or removal of pain. That tension mainly results from Epicurus's more or less successful attempt to reconcile his self-interested and self-regarding hedonism with the altruistic attitudes commonly admired and praised, and his effort to draw a picture of Epicurean hedonism as a cheerful but austere ethical system compatible with the ideals of self-denial and self-sacrifice.<sup>86</sup>

## CICERO'S CRITICISMS AND EPICUREAN RESPONSES

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Whether Epicurus and his adherents succeed in their enterprise depends in great part on the conceptual coherence and practical applicability of their brand of hedonism. The long history of the reception of Epicurean ethics reveals that these features have been challenged both in antiquity and in modern times. To conclude this chapter, we should look at some of the earliest criticisms against Epicurean hedonism spelled out by the character Cicero in *De finibus*, Book 2. Many of them are of Academic origin, others reflect Stoic reactions, yet others are probably formulated by Cicero himself. Their rhetorical effectiveness varies, while their philosophical relevance is, I submit, greater than it has been commonly thought to be.<sup>87</sup> To appreciate their philosophical value we should consider, as far as space allows, both the objections raised by Cicero and the ways in which the Epicureans could reply to them.

One set of objections concerns the alleged psychological foundation of Epicurean hedonism, and in particular the Epicureans' use of the Cradle Argument. While Epicurus appeals to the behavior of newborn animals to support his contention that pleasure is the supreme good and pain the greatest evil, one may question the legitimacy of that move. For the instincts of animals in the cradle may be wrong, even though they have not been corrupted (*Fin.* 2.33). Or lower animals may not be analogous to humans in the relevant way. Or it may be that the dispositional tendencies of infants are not analogous to adult human behavior. Or perhaps Epicurus and his followers simply misread the facts: newborn creatures are oriented towards self-regard, self-preservation, and protection from injury in both mind and body; and they seek the primary natural objects of desire, which

may include pleasure but are certainly not restricted to pleasure (2.33–34). So, as Cicero suggests, Epicurus's ethical hedonism cannot be inferred from or illustrated by the behavior of very young humans and other animals. Even assuming that the Cradle Argument could provide support for the normativity of pleasure, Cicero points to further problems arising because of the dual character of Epicurean pleasure, and because of the view that katastematic pleasure rather than kinetic pleasure constitutes the highest good. For instance, even if we concede that newborn creatures first and foremost seek pleasure, it may be that they are after the agreeable feelings of kinetic pleasure and not after the mere absence of pain (2.35). Therefore, the Cradle Argument may be judged irrelevant to the most crucial aspect of Epicurean hedonism, i.e., the supreme value of *aponia* and *ataraxia* for the good life.

More generally, Cicero's observation concerning the pleasures of newborns may lead one to wonder whether the katastematic condition has motivational power or to what extent it does. For unlike the objects of desires related to kinetic pleasures, *aponia* and *ataraxia* are determined in negative terms and are not connected with any specific sort of desire or any specific sort of process by which they may be attained. Hence, it is questionable whether *aponia* and *ataraxia* can provide adequate motivation or in what manner they can do so. In response, Epicurus would probably insist on the legitimacy of the analogy between humans and other animals, stress the uncorrupted nature of creatures soon after their birth, and insist on his own reading of the psychological facts. Moreover, he could either concede that newborn creatures seek kinetic pleasure, taking this observation to be sufficient for his purposes, or, more likely, contend that they primarily seek to remove discomfort, thus illustrating the supreme importance of katastematic pleasure. In any case, Epicurus and his followers would seem to have no option but to defend the idea that the removal of pain or disturbance constitutes our basic source of motivation. And they would probably do so, in great part, on the basis of an analogy between katastematic pleasure and health: more than anything, we naturally desire to be healthy in body and mind; and, as infant behavior shows, we are disposed to act accordingly.

This latter point becomes clearer when we turn to the criticisms concerning Epicurus's twofold concept of pleasure and its implications. Although, as Cicero confirms, he does not entirely disapprove of definitions

nor of determining the meaning of our terms, Cicero accuses him of leaving vague and ambiguous his use of “pleasure” (*Fin.* 2.6; *Tusc.* 3.17.38). For either the term refers to what everybody takes pleasure to be, i.e., some sort of agreeable stirring of the mind or of the senses, or it points to the peculiarly Epicurean notion of pleasure as absence of physical or mental pain. Torquatus’s retort, that no definitional outline of pleasure is necessary because everybody understands what the term means (2.6), will not do, and Cicero is right to reject it. For, by the first century BCE, the nature of pleasure was debated both outside and inside the Epicurean school, for the very reasons that Cicero also mentions: the idea that the highest pleasure is the absence of pain is counterintuitive; and the suggestion that pleasure has two distinct kinds or aspects (*alia genera*: 2.9) arguably undermines the unity of the Epicurean supreme good. Certain members of Epicurus’s school took the option of disputing the thesis that *aponia* and *ataraxia* are included in the moral end (*P.Herc.* 1012 1.1–8, 38.1–13),<sup>88</sup> whereas others upheld the view that Zeno’s school attributed to Epicurus’s canon, i.e., that the absence of physical pain and mental suffering represent the highest good for man. Cicero’s criticisms concerning the ambiguity of pleasure match the former line of thought, whereas Torquatus’s insistence that “freedom from pain” means the same thing as pleasure (2.9) reflects the orthodox position as constructed by Zeno of Sidon, Demetrius Laco, and Philodemus. Philosophically, the above controversy points to substantial problems affecting Epicurus’s dual moral end. Does the mere removal of pain, which is deemed equivalent to the katastematic state, qualify as pleasure? How does the kinetic pleasure, e.g., of actually quenching one’s thirst, relate to the katastematic condition of having quenched it (*Fin.* 2.9)? If these are two different sorts of experiences, how can they both be pleasure? Or assuming that they are two different kinds of pleasure (2.9), how are they related to each other?

As I maintained earlier, Epicurus probably viewed kinetic pleasures as steps towards, or alternatively, if they occur when all pain is absent, variations of the katastematic state. However, his extant works and those of his followers do not provide a satisfactory answer to Cicero’s queries concerning the exact sense in which kinetic pleasures are claimed to be variations or varieties (*varietates*) of static pleasure but to constitute no increase of this latter (*Fin.* 2.10). On the one hand, it is easy to understand how there may be variations of a poem, a speech, a character, or someone’s

fortunes. Moreover, pleasure too can be called varied in the sense that different things produce different pleasures. On the other hand, it is difficult to specify the sense in which the pleasant experiences that we may have when we are free from pain are variations of *aponia* (2.10). For instance, the experience of listening to music when all pain is absent does not depend on *aponia* in the way in which a variation of a poem or a speech depends on the main body of the poem or speech. Nor is it related to *aponia* in the way in which, e.g., pink is related to red or green is related to color. Nor yet is it the case that listening to music and being in a state of *aponia* are different pleasures of the same kind produced by different sources.

One possible answer might be that, while the experiential quality of restorative kinetic pleasures depends on the sort of need that they address, the experiential quality of non-restorative kinetic pleasures is determined by the fact that they supervene on the katastematic state. Having a drink when we are not thirsty simply *feels* different from drinking in order to quench one's thirst. Relatedly, the Epicureans could also try to respond to Cicero's accusation that they define the highest good solely in negative terms (2.41) by denying that their conception of the highest pleasure is negative. Namely, insofar as *aponia* and *ataraxia* correspond, respectively, to physical and mental health, they are equivalent not only to the absence of the greatest evil but also to the presence of the greatest good: a wonderful feeling of well-being that accompanies the unimpeded function of our body and mind and admits of no increase. This feeling is related to kinetic pleasures in a manner comparable to the manner in which health is related to the activities of the healthy organism. We preserve (and ought to preserve) our health by restoring the needs of our mind and body; and so long as we are healthy, we enjoy that condition both when we engage in various activities and when we do nothing at all. Similarly, the Epicureans make (and believe that we ought to make) every effort to keep the body free from pain and the mind free from disturbance. And they appear to think that anyone who finds oneself in the katastematic state does have a feeling of well-being, whether or not one enjoys kinetic pleasures as well while in that state. Objectively, then, kinetic and katastematic pleasures differ in that the former involve motions but the latter do not. Subjectively, however, although they are different sorts of experiences, they do share something in common: a sense of agreeableness, of things working as they should, physically and mentally. Whether this feature suffices to cement the unity of



Epicurus's twofold notion of pleasure is a question calling for further investigation.

Epicurus's conception of katastematic pleasure and the parallelism of this latter with health may explain why, as far as we know, Epicurus did not consider particularly damaging Anniceris's attempt to ridicule the moral goal of painlessness by comparing it to the condition of a corpse (DL 2.89). He probably believed that he had made sufficiently clear his view that *aponia* and *ataraxia* do not amount to insensitivity, but to positive states of awareness of one's physical and mental well-being. A similar thought may underlie his contention that the supreme good is self-evident and that this holds for katastematic as well as for kinetic pleasure. While Cicero objects to the idea that painlessness is self-evidently the good, Torquatus retorts without argument that, surely, nothing can be more pleasant than freedom from pain and that this latter is the most intense pleasure possible (*Fin.* 2.11).<sup>89</sup> Unlike Cicero, he appears to treat kinetic and katastematic pleasures on an equal footing: if the value of the one is self-evident, so is the value of the other. Again, katastematic pleasure is presented as a positively and supremely pleasant condition, not merely as a condition in which evil is absent. And again, Torquatus's account of katastematic pleasure points to a close analogy between this latter and health: like health, katastematic pleasure is unconditionally good, not merely not bad; and it feels great, not just neutral.<sup>90</sup> Nor do the Epicureans need to worry about Cicero's suggestion, also entertained by modern interpreters, to remove altogether the kinetic pleasures from the sphere of the supreme good and confine this latter to katastematic pleasure (2.12). For, as Epicurus and every consistent hedonist maintain, every pleasure, in so far as it is pleasure, is intrinsically good (cf. *KD* 8). And no competent language speaker would doubt that the kinetic pleasures, i.e., the agreeable stimulations of the senses or the mind, constitute genuine cases of pleasure and, therefore, belong to the domain of the good (cf. *Fin.* 2.8).

If the absence of pain falls under the heading of pleasure on account of being a positively (and supremely) agreeable condition, the Epicurean thesis that there is nothing intermediate between the experiences of pleasure and of pain acquires some plausibility. For it does not imply that we are always actually stirred by some feeling pleasurable or painful. Rather, the point is mainly that our body and mind function well (whether or not pleasurable motions occur) or badly, and we have a pleasant or painful

sense of the relevant fact. Contrast the Cyrenaics, who define all pleasures and pains in terms of smooth and rough motions and, therefore, feel compelled to grant also the existence of value-neutral experiences that do not correspond to such motions. Moreover, consider Cicero's objection, that ordinary life indicates that there are intermediate experiences which are neither pleasant nor painful (*Fin.* 2.16). Cicero believes this, because he shares the common assumption that pleasure consists solely in the agreeable stirring of the senses or the mind (2.14–15). But this is precisely the assumption that Epicurus rejects, thus inviting us to revise our understanding of pleasure and draw the appropriate inferences. Diogenes pursues this matter in an interesting direction, for he relies on Epicurus's rejection of an affectively intermediate state in order to defend the articles of the fourfold medicine and specifically the third dictum, i.e., that the good is easy to get (NF 146.1.1–2.13):

[Life offers us for our nutrition], although barley-bread [is sufficient] for our natural sustenance, [many] (foods) that do not involve unpleasantness when they are taken, and a bed that does not fight against the body because of hardness, and clothing that is neither extremely soft nor indeed extremely rough so that our nature would be repelled, just as if [we were clothing ourselves] [ . . . ] [with what] pricks [our constitution]. And in fact these things and those much greater are easily obtained, so that if (life) becomes one of continual luxury, and to others perhaps both a beneficial redeemer in their necessity, and——[a supporter] of the incapacitated in need.

According to this passage, the amenities that do not cause any discomfort are thereby pleasurable. If food does not provoke disgust (*ἀηδία*, *aedia*), it is pleasant for nutrition; if a bed does not make us physically uncomfortable, it is good to sleep on; etc. His point is not merely that natural desires are easy to satisfy with simple and readily accessible goods. Rather, he declares that the pleasures that begin just where discomfort ends are no less than those deriving from refined luxuries. In fact, according to Diogenes, the pleasures related to the removal of all discomfort do count as *luxuries*, precisely because the absence of pain *is* the highest pleasure.

Cicero raises additional objections pertaining to both the value of katastematic pleasure and the third article of the Epicurean *tetrapharmakos* positing that the good is easy to get. According to Cicero, this latter makes more sense for people who do not value pleasure highly than for those who do (*Fin.* 2.91):

Persons who despise pleasure in itself can say that they value a sturgeon no higher than a sprat; but a person whose chief good consists in pleasure must judge everything by the senses and not by reason and call those things the best which are most pleasant.

According to Cicero, then, consistent hedonists ought not to remain satisfied with nature's resources which are easily available to us. On the contrary, they ought to aim for more and varied pleasures, deriving from things that are rare or expensive and difficult to get.

A related criticism is oriented towards Epicurus's classification of desires and his suggestion that we ought to seek the pleasure deriving from the satisfaction of natural desires but resist the pull of desires that are non-natural or empty (*Fin.* 2.22):

This one point I cannot make out: how is it possible for a person to be devoted to pleasure and, nevertheless, keep his desires within bounds?

Of course, Epicurus and his adherents could reiterate their view that a correct understanding of pleasure entails that one realizes its limits and adjusts one's desires accordingly. However, it seems to me that Cicero's remark retains some weight, especially against Diogenes's aforementioned idea that, as long as they remove discomfort, the most rudimentary goods count as luxuries. For, assuming that more refined pleasures do not result in greater pain, why would a hedonist not seek them but be content with the plain pleasures at hand? Philodemus implicitly concedes the force of this point, when he attempts to draw a tenuous line between the easy accessibility of the good at hand and the Epicurean property manager's natural tendency to enjoy more goods, if they can be relatively easily secured (*Oec.* 16.4–6). However, the contention that the Epicurean hedonist will take huge risks at the prospect of considerable gains (*Fin.* 2.56–57) is flatly contradicted by Philodemus. In truth, the property manager conducting himself according to the ethical principles of the school will never take such risks. He will not engage in aggressive money-making, but will administer his wealth with moderation, primarily aiming to preserve it rather than to greatly increase it, cutting down expenses when necessary, and honoring his obligations to society and the requirements of friendship (*Oec.* 26.1–9, 27.5–12).

Cicero also puts his finger on what he perceives as inconsistencies between different claims that Epicurus makes. These concern, notably, the

respective value of kinetic and katastematic pleasure, the roles of physical and mental pleasures, and the limitations of these latter. First of all, he invites his audience to consider Epicurus's professed view that painlessness is the highest good in connection with his assertions that he cannot conceive of the good independently of the enjoyment of bodily pleasures, and that he would find no fault with profligates if they were free from fear and error (cf. *KD* 20). According to Cicero, if Epicurus were really committed to the former, he should not have stressed the dependence of all pleasure on the body nor should he have been ready to condone profligate pleasures provided that they are not accompanied by distress (*Fin.* 2.20–25). So, the argument goes, either Epicurus held conflicting views about the highest good or, in fact, he privileged kinetic pleasures over the katastematic state. However, I think that this argument is not decisive. As I proposed above, Epicurus's comment that he cannot imagine the good apart from bodily pleasure probably makes a conceptual point, but neither asserts nor implies that the good is equivalent solely to bodily pleasure. As for his statement that he would not blame those living in a swirl of pleasures if they were not afflicted by fear and falsehood, it is counterfactual. In truth, sybarites have the wrong conception of pleasure and, therefore, could never be rid of fear and empty beliefs. Even if it were possible for them to put aside for a while their passions, these latter would return and cause further suffering. Furthermore, Cicero asks (*Fin.* 2.21–22), what is the point of imagining profligates who, though living licentiously, might not be blamed by Epicurus? This question too has an answer: precisely, to point to the counterfactual nature of that hypothesis and underscore the hopelessness of the profligates' unceasing quest for pleasure.

Generally, Cicero interprets Epicurus's statement "that he cannot even understand what good there can be or where it can be found apart from that which comes from food and drink, the delight of the ears, and the grosser forms of gratification" (*Fin.* 2.7; cf. also 1.55) as being equivalent to the view that, in the end, all pleasure is bodily pleasure. In fact, this interpretation appears to belong to the anti-Epicurean polemics of the Academy, for Plutarch too appeals to it in order to accuse the Epicureans of profligacy. He argues that, contrary to the Cyrenaics, who realize that mental pleasures can be independent from and irreducible to bodily pleasures and hence propose practices of self-restraint, the Epicureans believe that every pleasure is rooted in the bare sense and therefore

encourage the mind to run riot by arousing more and more bodily pleasures (*Non posse*, 1089A–B). However, although the claim that all mental experiences originate (cf. *nasci*: *Fin.* 1.55) in the body *can* be taken to entail that all mental experiences are *reducible to* bodily ones, it does not *need* to be read in that manner. For the former claim presupposes that the body and the mind interact and that the involvement of the body is necessary for mental functions to occur. But that claim does not entail that, ultimately, mental functions are bodily functions, let alone that the pleasures of the body are more desirable than those of the mind. In this case as in others, Epicurus and his followers have to tread carefully, both acknowledging the necessities of our physical nature and making room for the moral predominance of rationality and the mind. Even if residual tensions remain, I submit that Torquatus has good grounds for denying that the aforementioned Epicurean views are inconsistent, and that Epicurus's tenet concerning the bodily origin of all pleasure constitutes a theoretical justification of profligacy.

This last remark holds both for the heedless profligate, who, by most accounts, does not really live pleasantly, and for the sophisticated profligate, who enjoys refined pleasures of the body and the mind without getting vulgar, ill, or bankrupt (*Fin.* 2.23). For contrary to what Cicero or his source appear to think (2.23), Epicurus would not accept that the sophisticated profligate lives well. Both these kinds of profligates think about pleasure in the wrong way, i.e., in quantitative terms. And both have empty beliefs that hinder the successful performance of the hedonistic calculus and cause anxiety and fear. Cicero's next criticism, that the mental pleasures of recollection and anticipation concern almost exclusively the kinetic pleasures of the body and hence are contemptible (2.107), is belied by Epicurus's own example. For the memories that he entertains on his deathbed and that enable him to feel joyful amidst great physical suffering are not about food, drink, and the like, but about his past conversations with his friends (DL 10.22).

The Epicureans could give a similar answer to a related Academic criticism leveled against them by Plutarch (*Non posse* 1089B):

Remembering and containing in oneself the sights and feelings and motions related to pleasures [the Epicureans] are in fact recommending a practice unworthy of the name of wisdom; they allow the dregs of pleasure to remain in the soul of the wise man as they would in the house of a profligate.

The Epicureans could retort that, in fact, the pleasures that the wise man stores and recollects are chiefly of the mind, not of the body; Epicurus's own example on his deathbed illustrates precisely that fact. Moreover, although it has been commonly assumed that, according to Epicurus, the pleasures of memory or anticipation are always kinetic, I contend that, in truth, they can be *katastematic* as well. For example, in the treatise *On the Moral End*, Epicurus stresses the importance of the physical stability of the body as well as the value inherent in the anticipation of that stability (Plutarch *Non posse* 1089d):

For the stable condition (*katastēma*) of the flesh and the reliable expectation concerning it (sc. the *katastēma*) contain the highest and most secure joy for those who are able to reach it by reasoning.

More damaging to the Epicurean cause, however, are the arguments brought by Cicero against the fourth principle of the *tetrapharmakos* and Epicurus's related contention that mental pleasures are always capable of offsetting physical pain. As indicated, the fourth principle consists in the claim that the bad is easy to avoid, for the reason that severe pain is brief, whereas milder and prolonged pain grants intervals of respite and can be counterbalanced by the mind. Nonetheless, Cicero objects that pain cannot be disregarded all that easily, especially by those who posit it as the supreme evil. He uses the rhetorical technique of demonstrating by example that, in fact, pain can be both severe and prolonged and also can occur intermittently and in bouts (*Fin.* 2.93–94). Also, he traces what he takes to be the limitations of Epicurean rationalism by arguing that, in cases of great and chronic pain, the strategy of recollecting past experiences in order to secure a preponderance of pleasure over pain does not work. For, because of his belief that pain is the greatest evil, the afflicted hedonist lives in bitter remembrance of the pain experienced in the recent past and in fear of the pain to come in the near future (2.95). One may find this a decisive objection and, furthermore, one may share Cicero's scepticism regarding our capacity to remember only what we choose to remember (2.104).<sup>91</sup> Also, some may go as far as endorsing Cicero's thesis that the best method of facing pain is to view it as a physical handicap rather than a moral evil, and to lessen its impact, whenever it occurs, by summoning one's own psychological and moral strength (2.95). If one opts for that path, then, of course, one must reject hedonism altogether.

There is no need to linger over Cicero's attack on Epicurean instrumentalism regarding the virtues and friendship for, as mentioned earlier, this topic is addressed elsewhere in the volume. In brief, he is unimpressed by Epicurus's effort to preserve central features of morality by stressing the unique role of the virtues in the good life and by determining this latter chiefly in terms of mental serenity rather than physical delights. Cicero makes use of the picture sketched by Cleanthes of the virtues ministering to pleasure as its handmaids (*Fin.* 2.69), which is intended to illustrate Epicurus's idea that the value of the virtues is only derivative and depends on the fact that they serve as means to pleasure (2.69, 107). Also, he argues that, in principle, Epicurus leaves open the possibility that one will commit any action, however base or criminal, provided that it remains undetected (28). And, anticipating the Epicurean retort that, pragmatically speaking, we have good reasons to act virtuously because wrongdoers are usually caught, he remarks that actions are genuinely virtuous only if they derive from a good disposition, not from one's fear of punishment. Hence, Epicurean virtue is a sham (*Fin.* 2.69–71). Now, this objection may be considered unfair, for Cicero does not take adequately into account Epicurus's thesis that pleasure and the virtues are interrelated nor the relevant features of the Epicurean wise man. However, Cicero's contentions that virtue is a matter of one's moral disposition and not of deterrents, and also that instrumental virtue is no virtue at all, should give us pause for reflection. And Epicurean hedonists would have reason to find disturbing Cicero's suggestion, probably inspired by Glaucon's and Adeimantus's amplification of Thrasymachus's challenge in *Republic* Book 2, that the mere appearance of virtue serves the Epicureans just as well as virtue itself does (2.71).

Similar remarks concern Epicurean friendship as well. On the one hand, Epicurus advances the claims that the sage will love his friend as much as himself (*Fin.* 1.67–68) and will sometimes die for his friend (DL 10.121), alongside his thesis that each agent's own pleasure is the moral goal. Hence he gives the impression of a more or less successful attempt to reconcile his self-interested and self-regarding ethics with the altruistic attitudes praised by conventional morality.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, Cicero contends that genuine friendship is fundamentally incompatible with the overarching pursuit of one's own pleasure and hence Epicurean friendship is not friendship at all (*Fin.* 2.78–85). Like other criticisms, this one too was



probably in circulation before Cicero's time. For Torquatus reports the response of certain Epicureans, according to whom friendship originates from self-regard but eventually acquires independent value (1.67–68). Whether this latter approach is compatible with the egoistic bent of the Founder's hedonism or whether it allows for genuine altruism is another matter.

As mentioned, the Epicureans are eudemonists and Cicero views them as such. According to his account, they believe that happiness extends over one's life making it perfect and complete, and also that happiness consists in a preponderance of the good over the evil and that, once acquired, it cannot be lost. However, Cicero maintains that their kind of eudemonism is flawed and their notion of happiness problematic, precisely because it is ultimately determined by reference to pleasure. One set of arguments targets the Epicurean tenets concerning the quantification of pleasure over a lifetime and the relevance of this to the finitude of one's life and the possibility of achieving perfect happiness (cf. *KD* 19–21). Like most ancient and modern interpreters, Cicero understands Torquatus to say that the temporal duration of pleasure is irrelevant to its pleasantness, and that both a shorter and a longer period of time contain equal *amounts* of pleasure (2.87).<sup>93</sup> So, he retorts that, in fact, if pleasure is the good, the more we get of it the better life should be; in other words, if one is a hedonist, one ought to be committed to the maximization of pleasure. Cicero defends that contention, first, by postulating a symmetry between pleasure and pain. If pleasure is not increased by duration, nor is pain; but this implication is absurd. Conversely, if pain is greater the longer it lasts, so pleasure is better the longer it lasts. Second, Cicero appeals to Epicurus's notion of the gods as blissful and eternal: if duration does not matter, why describe the perfect happiness of the gods as everlasting? Both arguments point to the conclusion that, in truth, duration *does* matter and Epicurus implicitly recognizes that fact.

However, an alternative interpretation is now on the table as well.<sup>94</sup> When Epicurus claims that infinite and finite time have equal pleasure (*KD* 19) and that the person who realizes both the limits of pleasure and the limits of life knows what makes the whole life complete (*pantelēs*), he does not mean that the duration of one's life is irrelevant to *how much* pleasure one will experience. Rather, he means that a life acquires its value in virtue of being finite and of having a proper structure from which nothing

essential is missing. The opening lines of Epicurus's deathbed letter to Idomeneus express just that concern: "I wrote this to you while I was spending and at the same time bringing to its proper close that blessed day which is my life" (DL 10.22).<sup>95</sup> If the Epicurean position is read along these lines, Cicero's criticism becomes moot. If, on the other hand, one opts for the former, traditional interpretation of Epicurus's stance concerning the temporal duration of pleasure, the Epicureans could defend their position as follows: they could deny that there is symmetry between pleasure and pain, but insist that the correct understanding of pleasure entails, precisely, removing the belief that pleasure increases with time.

Yet another group of Ciceronian arguments focuses on the vulnerability of Epicurean happiness with regard to the supreme evil and to factors beyond our own control. In the first place, if pleasure is the supreme good but pain the greatest evil, and since pain is bound to affect all of us some time in life, then even the sage cannot be happy when he is afflicted by pain (*Fin.* 2.104). But insofar as happiness is permanent and not intermittent, one might draw the conclusion that the sage cannot be happy at all. If so, then something must be very wrong with Epicurus's hedonistic eudemonism, for it jeopardizes the prospect of the good life. A related point is this: since Epicurus makes pleasure importantly dependent on external sources, and since the availability of these external sources is subject to fortune, it follows that happiness too is subject to fortune. This holds not only for Epicurean laymen, but also for the wise man. Of course, Epicurus would deny that the sage is in any way the slave of fortune. Physical pain cannot shatter the katastematic pleasure of Epicurean exemplars. As for mental pains, even though they can have greater intensity than physical suffering (cf. 2.108), they cannot affect those who live according to the principles of Epicureanism. For these latter have the intellectual resources of eradicating the empty beliefs constitutive of the passions, and hence of removing the causes of mental or psychic pain.

However, the answer available to the Epicureans vis-à-vis the criticism that pleasure crucially depends on externals outside our control may be judged unsatisfactory. Consider, for instance, Metrodorus's claim that happiness consists in sound health and an assurance of its continuance (*Fin.* 2.92). As Cicero points out, there can be no certitude that one will be healthy for the entire span of one's natural life. Moreover, his remark that the actions of many illustrious people demonstrate that their motives were

other than pleasure (2.34–35)<sup>96</sup> also bears on the Epicurean conception of happiness, as does Torquatus's response. On the one hand, this latter maintains that eminent statesmen acted as they did because of hedonic motives: one had his child beheaded, another sent his son to exile, yet another committed suicide, and so on. On the other hand, however, Torquatus does not even broach the question how happiness could be factually or psychologically possible in the aftermath of such actions. Overall, I think that his position would be more defensible, if he argued that people with sound Epicurean values shall not do such things, precisely because the latter cause far greater pain than pleasure in both the short and the long run.

A last challenge raised by Cicero seems to me to constitute a serious philosophical problem for Epicurean hedonism. Cicero aptly calls it “the silence of history” (*Fin.* 2.67): there are simply no recorded examples of distinguished persons who have explained their actions by claiming that they were seeking their own pleasure. According to Cicero, the reason is that they feel shame. So, Cicero asks, what are the Epicureans' options (*Fin.* 2.77)?

Are you to affect an artificial language and say what you do not think? Or are you to change your opinions like your clothes and have one set to wear indoors and another to wear when you go out? Outside all show and pretense, but your true self concealed within? Reflect, I ask of you, is this right? It seems to me that these opinions are true which are honorable, praiseworthy, and noble, and which can be openly avowed in the senate and the popular assembly and in every company and gathering, so that one need not be ashamed to say what one is not ashamed to think.

Of course, the Epicureans could deny that they conceal their hedonistic motivations. For example, they could mention the fact that they participate in the banquets devoted to the worship of Epicurus, a man who professed and practiced hedonistic values and thereby lived an exemplary moral life. However, the Garden was not a public venue. And the ritualistic celebration of Epicurus in that context does not constitute a counterexample to the above criticism. In the end, Cicero's claim that genuine moral ideals must have a public character is both defensible and attractive. Whether Epicurean pleasure could, in fact, possess such public character remains, to my mind, an open issue.

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<sup>1</sup> The sophist Prodicus relates an allegory, according to which Hercules was confronted with just that choice and opted for Virtue, rejecting Pleasure.

<sup>2</sup> Plat. *Prot.* 351b–358d, *Gorg.* 492d–507e, *Rep.* 9.581a–587e, and the *Philebus*. The citations are found in that order also in Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.121.

<sup>3</sup> See *NE* 7.11–17, 10.1–5, *Rhet.* 1.10–11, also cited by Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.121.

<sup>4</sup> It is debated whether or not Aristippus the Elder was really an ethical hedonist. See Tsouna, “Aristippus of Cyrene.”

<sup>5</sup> Aristippus the Younger defended the primacy of bodily pleasure over mental pleasure, possibly on the analogical grounds that bodily pain is considered worse than its psychic counterpart (DL 2.87). Later Cyrenaics modify this view in ways suitable to their own broader concerns. See Laks, “Annicéris et les plaisirs psychiques”; and Lampe, *The Birth of Hedonism*.

<sup>6</sup> This term is probably intended to indicate that pleasure lasts and has value only as long as we are experiencing it: see Tsouna, *The Epistemology of the Cyrenaic School*, 15–16; and Sedley, “Epicurean versus Cyrenaic Happiness.”

<sup>7</sup> They have no moral value, the former because it exists no more, the latter because it does not yet exist and is not manifest (Athenaus *Deipn.* 12.544a–b). The thesis that pleasure is *monochronos* holds for both physical and mental pleasure, and the same goes for pain.

<sup>8</sup> See Tsouna, “Diogenes and the Cyrenaics.”

<sup>9</sup> See Asmis, “Epicurean Epistemology.”

<sup>10</sup> Since Lucretius is the topic of a separate chapter, I shall not much engage with *DRN*.

<sup>11</sup> To some degree I follow the order of Torquatus’s presentation in Cicero’s *De finibus*. As David Sedley remarks (“Epicurean Anti-reductionism,” 134), although Torquatus’s exposé is not directly drawn from Epicurus, since it also incorporates divergent views of later Epicurean groups, nonetheless its structure constitutes evidence of Epicurus’s original methodology in the presentation and defense of his hedonism.

<sup>12</sup> In particular, fresh evidence is likely to emerge from the application of recently discovered techniques to the study of the Herculaneum papyri, and also from the publication of new fragments belonging to Diogenes’s inscription.

<sup>13</sup> On the philosophical value of Cicero’s rhetorically expressed criticisms against Epicurus, see Inwood, “Rhetorica Disputatio: The Strategy of *De Finibus* II.” The admirable study by Schofield, “Ciceronian Dialogue” sheds light on the nature of Ciceronian dialogue and includes discussion of several excerpts from the first two books of the *De finibus*.

<sup>14</sup> Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* and Nikolsky, “Epicurus on Pleasure” construe Epicurus’s conception of pleasure independently of Cicero’s testimony. Although I am sympathetic to the idea, defended by Nikolsky, that Epicurus shaped his hedonism in response to debates within the Academy, I do not think that these debates are Epicurus’s only reference point nor, as will become evident, do I find persuasive the arguments on account of which the above authors saw fit to disregard the evidence of the *De finibus*. Notably, there is no textual support for Gosling and Taylor’s contention that sensory pleasures untainted by pain are *katastematic*; on the contrary, they are described in the terms of “sweet motions.” Nor is it true, as Nikolsky claims, that Epicurus was not particularly interested in the distinction between kinetic and *katastematic* pleasure. For we find this distinction in his treatise *On the Moral End* and, philosophically, it is crucial in order to distinguish the goal advocated by Epicurean hedonism from the pleasures of the profligates which, as Epicureans of all periods suggest, coincide with those pursued by the Cyrenaics. On this last point, see Tsouna, “Cyrenaics and Epicureans on Pleasure and the Good Life.”

<sup>15</sup> On the foundational structure of Epicurus’s ethics and the parallel structure of his physics, see the compelling argument by Sedley, “The Inferential Foundation for Epicurean Ethics.”

<sup>16</sup> See Tsouna, “Cicéron et Philodème: quelques considérations sur l’éthique.”

<sup>17</sup> See Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.90.

<sup>18</sup> It seems that, in Epicurus’s view, pleasure and pain are the primary feelings, while other feelings can be classified under them.

<sup>19</sup> See Usener, *Epicurea*, 119. A different view is taken by Arrighetti, *Epicuro. Opere*, 187–90.

<sup>20</sup> Although Torquatus refers to the psychological hedonism of *omne animal*, every living being, I focus my discussion specifically on humans.

<sup>21</sup> See Brunschwig, “The Cradle Argument in Epicureanism and Stoicism.”

<sup>22</sup> As Brunschwig, “The Cradle Argument in Epicureanism and Stoicism,” 117 notes, Torquatus makes no attempt to justify that assertion by appealing to observable evidence, nor does he show any hesitation when he tells us what an infant feels and desires. The reason is that the psychological hedonism of very small children and animals had been a topic of intense discussion in the Academy, and its possibilities and implications had been fully explored. Notably, Eudoxus thought that the desire that obviously attracts all living beings to itself is the *sēmeion*, sign, that it is the best for everybody (*NE* 1172b9). On the other hand, Speusippus rejected hedonism on just those grounds.

<sup>23</sup> This view has been defended on different grounds by Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 240–44; and Cooper, “Pleasure and Desire in Epicurus.”

<sup>24</sup> See Cooper, “Pleasure and Desire in Epicurus.”

<sup>25</sup> Cooper, “Pleasure and Desire in Epicurus.”

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Woolf, “What Kind of Hedonist Was Epicurus?”; and Dimas, “Epicurus on Pleasure, Desire, and Friendship,” 165–68.

<sup>27</sup> See Dimas, “Epicurus on Pleasure, Desire, and Friendship,” 165–66.

<sup>28</sup> This point is argued by Brunschwig, “The Cradle Argument in Epicureanism and Stoicism,” 120–21.

<sup>29</sup> These texts are discussed with a different purpose by Brunschwig, “The Cradle Argument in Epicureanism and Stoicism,” 124–25.

<sup>30</sup> Sedley, “The Inferential Foundation for Epicurean Ethics,” 136–37.

<sup>31</sup> I have briefly argued for this view in Tsouna, “Epicureanism and Hedonism.” The same position is also held by Dimas, “Epicurus on Pleasure, Desire, and Friendship” on different grounds.

<sup>32</sup> On this point, see Sedley, “The Inferential Foundation for Epicurean Ethics,” 137–38.

<sup>33</sup> It is important to register that what is commonly called the Epicurean hedonistic calculus greatly differs from the hedonistic calculus as it occurs in Jeremy Bentham and, generally, the Empiricist tradition. While this latter measures one’s pleasurable feelings against painful ones, the Epicureans concern themselves with a broader and richer sort of calculus conducted through *phronēsis* and oriented towards moral choice. Bentham’s calculus aims, precisely, to maximize one’s feelings of pleasure, whereas the Epicurean calculus does not. See, notably, the perceptive discussion of Epicurean pleasure by Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability*, 11–58.

<sup>34</sup> Note the use of the first person plural in the passage that follows.

<sup>35</sup> For the text of Diogenes’s inscription I use the editions by M. F. Smith and by J. Hammerstaedt and M. F. Smith. The translations are my own unless I indicate otherwise, but I have heavily relied on the translations provided by those two authors, as well as by Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1.

<sup>36</sup> I provisionally accept Smith’s restoration of 3.12–14.

<sup>37</sup> This is a conjecture, but nonetheless it is clear from the context that here Diogenes talks about the hedonistic calculus.

<sup>38</sup> On the author and the title of *P.Herc.* 1251, see Indelli and Tsouna-McKirahan, [*Philodemus*] [*On Choices and Avoidances*], 61–70.

<sup>39</sup> Such criticisms are discussed by Sedley, “Epicurus and His Professional Rivals”; and Erler and Schofield, “Epicurean Ethics,” 643.

<sup>40</sup> Such is the practice of Cicero and Plutarch. See my study of the polemics between the Cyrenaics and the Epicureans and, especially, the role that the two Academic authors played in those polemics in Tsouna, “Cyrenaics and Epicureans on Pleasure and the Good Life.”

<sup>41</sup> The relevant excerpt is the following: “[They claim that], in truth, no [judgment takes precedence over any other], since they are persuaded that [the great affection] of the soul occurs as a result of pain and that we [accomplish our choices] and avoidances in that manner, [by observing both] (sc. both physical and mental pain). For it is not possible that [the] joys arise in us in the same way and [all together], in accordance with [some] expectation ...” (2.5–15) “Some people [denied] that it is possible to know anything. And [they added] that if nothing is present on account of which one [should] make an immediate choice, then one [should not choose] in an immediate manner. Others, having selected the affections of the soul as the moral ends and as not in need of additional judgement based on further things, granted to everybody unchallengeable authority to take pleasure in whatever they cared to name and to do whatever contributed to it. Yet others held the doctrine that what we call grief or joy are totally empty notions, because of the manifest indeterminacy of things ...” (3.2–18 Indelli and Tsouna McKirahan).

<sup>42</sup> However, the Cyrenaics do not posit as the moral ends “the affections of the soul,” but the affections of both the soul and the body. I think that the genitive *tēs psychēs* either qualifies *telē* or is used in a generic sense indicating the entire living person.

<sup>43</sup> Other aspects of Philodemus’s argument against the Cyrenaics are discussed in Tsouna, “Cyrenaics and Epicureans on Pleasure and the Good Life.”

<sup>44</sup> See Tsouna, “Diogenes and the Cyrenaics.”

<sup>45</sup> Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> See Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics*, 129–49.

<sup>47</sup> That the contrast in question is deliberate is suggested by both Lampe, *The Birth of Hedonism*; and Tsouna, “Cyrenaics and Epicureans on Pleasure and the Good Life.”

<sup>48</sup> However, bodily pleasures can adversely affect our happiness if we miscalculate their long-term consequences.

<sup>49</sup> A general overview of Epicurean therapeutic techniques is offered by Tsouna, “Epicurean Therapeutic Strategies.”

<sup>50</sup> See, notably, Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, 365–96; and Nikolsky, “Epicurus on Pleasure.” Participants in the debate comprise Rist, *Epicurus. An Introduction*; Giannantoni, “Il piacere cinetico nell’etica epicurea”; Striker, “Antipater, or the Art of Living”; Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability*, 45–52; Hossenfelder, “Epicurus—hedonist malgré lui”; Purinton, “Epicurus on the *telos*”; and Konstan, “Epicurean Happiness: A Pig’s Life?”

<sup>51</sup> See Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, 15–17.

<sup>52</sup> On Diogenes’s use of *κατάστημα* (*katastema*) to denote Epicurean pleasure, see also NF 192 3.10–4.1.

<sup>53</sup> For further discussion of fr. 34, see Tsouna, “Diogenes and the Cyrenaics.”

<sup>54</sup> The extant fragments of the Epicureans do not settle the question whether, when we are in a condition of *katastematic* pleasure, there may be some physical motion of which we are unaware or, alternatively, there is no motion at all. The Cyrenaic philosopher Anniceris appears to assume the latter, when he compares the condition of *katastematic* pleasure with the state of a corpse.

<sup>55</sup> Regarding this point, compare the contributions by Mitsis, *Epicurus' Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability*, 45–46; and Striker, “Antipater, or the Art of Living,” 15.

<sup>56</sup> A different view is defended by Dimas, “Epicurus on Pleasure, Desire, and Friendship” who argues that the pleasures experienced in the katastematic state are katastematic pleasures.

<sup>57</sup> The same holds for other pleasures considered by Epicurus: looking at a painting, tasting something savory, smelling a perfume, listening to music, and, generally, experiencing sensory or esthetic pleasures (cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 3.41).

<sup>58</sup> See Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.123. Also relevant are the remarks concerning Epicurus's concept of the limit of pleasure and the Epicureans' classification of desires.

<sup>59</sup> On this point, see Warren, *Facing Death*, 145 ff.

<sup>60</sup> See Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, 269–77.

<sup>61</sup> See Sedley, “Epicurean versus Cyrenaic Happiness.”

<sup>62</sup> Different developments of this suggestion are found in Hossenfelder, “Epicurus—hedonist malgré lui,” Mitsis, *Epicurus' Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability*, 11–58; and Woolf, “What Kind of Hedonist Was Epicurus?,” 172–75.

<sup>63</sup> A philosophical defense of that thesis, also in connection to the Cradle Argument, is provided by Woolf, “What Kind of Hedonist Was Epicurus?,” 173–75.

<sup>64</sup> κατὰ τὴν suppl. Usener. The supplementation is also accepted by Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*.

<sup>65</sup> See Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*; Irwin, “Aristippus against Happiness”; and the response by Tsouna-McKirahan in “Is there an exception to Greek eudaemonism?”

<sup>66</sup> On my own reconstruction of the story in Tsouna, “Cyrenaics and Epicureans on Pleasure and the Good Life,” Anniceris's “corrected” version of Cyrenaic hedonism (Strabo 17.3.22) is a response to Epicurus's newly minted hedonism (see also Lampe, *The Birth of Hedonism*, 22), not the other way around, as many scholars have thought.

<sup>67</sup> See Warren, *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*, 190–91.

<sup>68</sup> According to Cyrenaic orthodoxy, the movement of the flesh or the soul associated with pleasure disappears with time (DL 2.89).

<sup>69</sup> Assuming that our identity remains stable over time (contra Irwin, “Aristippus against Happiness”; and Zilioli, *The Cyrenaics*, 162–65), there is no reason why we should not try to secure future pleasures or avoid future pains. On various aspects of Cyrenaic future planning, see Graver, “Managing Mental Pain”; O'Keefe, “The Cyrenaics on Pleasure, Happiness, and Future-Concern”; Sedley, “Epicurean versus Cyrenaic Happiness”; and Warren, “Epicurus and the Pleasures of the Future.” O'Reilly's M.Phil. thesis offers illuminating insights on the Cyrenaic technique of the pre-rehearsal of future evils.

<sup>70</sup> These occurrences are the so-called intermediate *pathē*.

<sup>71</sup> I argue for this claim in Tsouna, “Cyrenaics and Epicureans on Pleasure and the Good Life.”

<sup>72</sup> If the desires necessary for happiness are oriented towards *ataraxia*, and those necessary for physical annoyance towards *aponia*, the desire for life itself can be taken to be more fundamental than either of them and to be related to the natural tendency of all living beings to remain alive. Hence the Epicureans' recommendation to take care of one's health has strong naturalistic backing, in so far as it can be justified by reference to a necessary tendency of which the intentional object is, precisely, self-preservation.

<sup>73</sup> For instance, desires for food and clothing are both natural and necessary. The desire for sex is only natural. And the desires for luxury, power, or fame are empty, probably in the sense that their objects have no real value.

<sup>74</sup> I am grateful to Paul Kalligas and Vassilis Karasmanis for discussion and to George Bebedelis for written comments on this point.

<sup>75</sup> Epicurus talks about some people (*tines*) who ignore, disagree with, or misconstrue the Epicurean doctrine of pleasure, saying that it posits licentious pleasures as the moral end. Philosophers who do not agree with the Epicurean end of painlessness probably include the Cyrenaics.

<sup>76</sup> According to Lucretius, greed could be one of the many emotions that, in fact, mask the presence of the fear of death—probably the deepest and most fundamental fear of humans.

<sup>77</sup> *De elect.* 14.1–14 states only a one-way entailment, and also adds to the four canonical virtues several others.

<sup>78</sup> On *phronēsis* as the source of all the other virtues, see the careful analysis in Mitsis, *Epicurus' Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability*, 75 ff.

<sup>79</sup> In my opinion, *toutōn pantōn* (*Ep. Men.* 132) refers back to the elements that constitute a pleasurable life and are secured through “sober reasoning” about the causes of moral choice.

<sup>80</sup> For further discussion, see Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, 25–27.

<sup>81</sup> The interpretation of this fragment is controversial. Namely, it has been debated for over a decade whether Diogenes's unnamed opponents in fr. 33 + NF 128 are the Stoics (Smith, *Diogenes of Oinoanda: The Epicurean Inscription and Supplement to Diogenes of Oinoanda: The Epicurean Inscription*, ad loc.) or the Cyrenaics (Sedley, “Diogenes of Oinoanda on Cyrenaic Hedonism”), or both (see the contribution of Francesca Masi in Güremen, Hammerstaedt, and Morel, *Diogenes of Oinoanda: Epicureanism and Philosophical Debates*). On balance, I am inclined to believe that the opponents under discussion are the Cyrenaics, for reasons that I develop elsewhere (see my article “Diogenes and the Cyrenaics”). Below, I cite the crucial excerpts of the fragment, relying on Sedley's emendation and translation of the text.

<sup>82</sup> fr. 33 1.10–12——*πασῶν ἀρετῶν/—ν ἀχώριστον οὐ/[σαν τ]ῇν ἡδονήν, εὐρίσ-/ [κόμ]ε[νον] δ' ὁμολογοῦσι/[τυχεῖν] καὶ οὗτοι πολλά-/ [κι]ς οὐκ ἄπο[* Sedley. On the other hand, Smith, *Supplement to Diogenes of Oinoanda: The Epicurean Inscription*, ad loc. proposes the following reconstruction of fr. 33 1.9–14: [*—τὸ ζ]ῆν δι[ὰ] παντὸς ἡ-/ [δέως τῶν] πασῶν ἀρετῶν/[αἰεὶ ἐστ]ὶν ἀχώριστον, οὐ/[φασι τῇ]ν ἡδονήν εὐρίσ-/ [κειν, μό]νον δ' ὁμολογοῦσι/[γε σοφισ]ταὶ οὗτοι πολλά-/ [κι]ς οὐκ ἄπο[* .

<sup>83</sup> See Hammerstaedt, “Zum Text der epikureischen Inschrift des Diogenes von Oinoanda,” 32–38.

<sup>84</sup> However, such acts derive their value from the pleasure that ensues, not from the virtue involved in their performance.

<sup>85</sup> According to David Sedley, “Diogenes of Oinoanda on Cyrenaic Hedonism,” the Cyrenaics are the only group of ancient *hedonists* that *both* view virtue instrumentally *and* describe it as an irksome means to pleasurable ends; and therefore, it is plausible to think that they are the targets of Diogenes's charge.

<sup>86</sup> Some later Epicureans, probably under the pressure of Academic criticism, have admitted sources of motivation other than pleasure and have asserted that friendship is intrinsically valuable for the good life (*Fin.* 1.67–70; SV 23 Brown).

<sup>87</sup> See also the chapter of Carlos Lévy on Cicero in this volume.

<sup>88</sup> Demetrius Laco corrects Epicureans who, in their writings, formulate in an equivocal manner Epicurus's conception of the moral end, and he insists that Epicurus considers pleasure to be, first and foremost, the removal of pain.

<sup>89</sup> However, Torquatus believes that proof is useful in order to counter the arguments of the school's rivals regarding pleasure (*Fin.* 1.31).



<sup>90</sup> Cicero's further objection that, even assuming that the katastematic condition is the most pleasant *state* it does not need to be *identical* with pleasure, i.e., kinetic pleasure (2.11), remains undeveloped. The crucial question is this: if one can be in a katastematic condition without experiencing any kinetic pleasure at all, on account of what factor would the former be pleasant?

<sup>91</sup> I quite agree with Cicero that Epicurus expects too much from his followers (2.105), insofar as he takes for granted that they can use their memory exactly as they want.

<sup>92</sup> Some scholars believe that Epicurus held that friendship has elements of altruism and other-concern even if these elements cause problematic tensions in the doctrine: see Mitsis, *Epicurus' Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability*, ch. 3; and Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, ch. 11. Others maintain that Epicurus values friendship only instrumentally: see O'Keefe, "Is Epicurean Friendship Altruistic?"; and Brown, "Epicurus on the Value of Friendship (*Sententia Vaticana* 23)." An argument to the effect that egoistic hedonism is entirely compatible with Epicurus's view of friendship is advanced by Dimas, "Epicurus on Pleasure, Desire, and Friendship."

<sup>93</sup> Most ancient and modern scholars read Epicurus's thesis in the way Cicero does. I call this the traditional reading which, however, is rejected by Sedley, "Epicurean versus Cyrenaic Happiness."

<sup>94</sup> Sedley, "Epicurean versus Cyrenaic Happiness."

<sup>95</sup> Both the translation and the interpretation of that passage belong to Sedley, "Epicurean versus Cyrenaic Happiness."

<sup>96</sup> Evidently, the debate between Cicero and Torquatus concerning the performance of heroic deeds bears also on the topics of the hedonistic calculus, the instrumentalism of the virtues, and the egoistic aspect of Epicurean eudemonism.



## CHAPTER 8

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# PSYCHOLOGY

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ELIZABETH ASMIS

EPICURUS held that nothing exists by itself except bodies and void, and that bodies are either atoms or made up of atoms.<sup>1</sup> There is no third type of thing. There is, therefore, no special soul stuff. The soul (*psychê*) does exist, and it is made up of atoms and void. The same is true of mind (*dianoia*), which is part of the soul. The soul is a corporeal part of the living body, interacting physically with the rest of the body. This makes Epicurus an antidualist: for, although soul and mind differ in composition from the rest of the living being, they are corporeal substances just like the rest.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the outdated physics, there is something intriguingly modern about Epicurus's antidualism. Epicurus took up the challenge of providing detailed materialist explanations of mental processes; and, in this endeavor, he encountered many problems that continue to spur investigation today. This chapter will focus on three main questions. In the first place, how are soul, mind, and body related to each other? Second, how does the union of body and soul produce cognition? Third, how does the union of body and soul produce a person? I shall divide the second topic (cognition) into two parts: sense perception and belief. I shall also divide the third topic (the person) in two: motivation (comprising feelings, emotions, and action collectively) and self-development. The chapter as a whole will thus be

divided into five sections, beginning with the physical nature of a living being and ending with the nature of the person.

A question that has become prominent in recent discussions of Epicurean psychology is: how can physical processes account for mental functions? David Sedley, for instance, has argued that Epicurus took a radically emergentist position, according to which the mind can cause changes in its underlying atomic structure.<sup>3</sup> Others have argued that Epicurus held that all mental activity is caused by events at the atomic level, without any “top-down” causation from the mental to the atomic level. I shall defer this issue until the last section of the chapter. Meanwhile, I shall lay the groundwork by outlining the atomic structure of a human being and examining how it produces cognition and motivation. Along the way, I shall draw attention to the continuity of animal life with human life. I shall also highlight an aspect of Epicurean psychology that has received rather scant attention in the past: the concept of attention (called *epibolê*, Latin *iniectus*), or directing oneself to an object of awareness. This, I suggest, may be regarded as a precursor of modern theories of intentionality. In the penultimate section, I shall offer a rough chart of the emotions, an area of vital importance to Epicurean ethics.

## SOUL, MIND, AND BODY

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First, then, Epicurus held that the soul is a distinct kind of body, different from the kind of body that it animates. There are two points that he especially emphasizes in his short explanation of the soul in the *Letter to Herodotus*, a summary of his physics. One is that every claim about the soul must be confirmed by the evidence provided by our sense perceptions (*aisthêseis*) and feelings (*pathê*). This is basic Epicurean methodology (*Ep. Hdt.* 38). Epicurus reiterates the point both at the beginning and at the end of his explanation of the soul in the *Letter to Herodotus* (63–68). There is need, it seems, of a special reminder because the soul is traditionally fraught with mystery. Epicurus insists that, like everything else that is not immediately accessible to observation, the soul must be explained by inference from sense perception and feelings. All the rest is myth.

The second point concerns the relationship of the soul to the rest of the animate body. Epicurus devotes most of his brief explanation to showing the interdependence of soul and the “rest of the aggregate (*athroisma*).” The latter is a circumlocution for the word “body” (*sōma*). Epicurus conspicuously avoids opposing the soul to the “body” in this physical explanation. This is in contrast with the treatment he offers in the summary of his ethics, the *Letter to Menoeceus*, where he admits the commonplace distinction between body and soul.<sup>4</sup> The reason is that, at the level of the atoms, the soul is no less a body than what is normally called “the body.” By calling the soul a “body” in the *Letter to Herodotus* (63), Epicurus emphasizes that the soul is one kind of body linked to another kind of body. The whole “aggregate” is a single body, consisting of parts that pass on powers to one another.

What sort of body is the soul? Epicurus calls it a “fine body,” spread through the whole complex, and “most like breath (*pneuma*) having a certain mixture of heat” (*Ep. Hdt.* 63). Lucretius names air as a third component additional to breath (which he also calls “wind”) and heat (3.232–37, 247–48). This analysis is compatible with that of Epicurus; for, as Lucretius explains, heat comes with air. Lucretius also adds a fourth component (3.238–57). This is also compatible with Epicurus’s exposition; in fact, there is reason to suppose that Epicurus himself added it in the rather opaque sentence that follows the description just cited.<sup>5</sup> As Lucretius sets out in detail, the fourth component is finer and more mobile than anything else; and it does not have a name. It is necessary for sensation to occur. As the origin of sensory awareness, it passes on this power to the other components of the soul (first heat and wind, then air), then to the rest of the body (first blood, then flesh, and finally to bones and marrow). Lucretius calls it the “soul of the soul” (3.275–81), while insisting that it forms a single “body” with the rest of the soul (3.265). The four components are intertwined with one another into a “single nature” (3.270), the soul, which pervades the entire complex.

The fourth unnamed component has an air of mystery about it. One might object that Epicurus is here resorting to a method that he so strenuously decries elsewhere: this is myth, not science. Yet Epicurus insists, just after he has explained the composition of the soul, that “all of this is shown clearly by the powers of the soul, feelings, ease of movement, thoughts, and what we are deprived of when we die” (*Ep. Hdt.* 63).

Lucretius provides an example: we infer that there is something warm and breath-like in the living, for this is what departs from the dying (3.232–33). Other observations, we may assume, indicate that something even finer is needed to produce sensation (we can't just reanimate a corpse, for example, by breathing warm air into it); and for this we don't have a name in ordinary experience. We can, however, be sure that it is corporeal; for there is nothing incorporeal except void, and this cannot act or be acted on (*Ep. Hdt.* 67). On this line of reasoning, the unnamed nature is no more mysterious than the atoms in general; we infer its existence on the basis of our observations.

To illustrate the interdependence of soul and its bodily container, Epicurus focuses on a particular kind of power, sense perception (*aisthêsis*). None of our sources says explicitly that all beings with soul have sense perception, but this may be taken as implied. In any case, there is no indication that Epicurus, like Aristotle, assigned soul to plants as well as animals. Just like the soul as a whole, the power of sense perception extends throughout the ensouled being. The soul supplies the “main cause” of perception, but is not itself sufficient for perception. It needs to be joined by another cause, a suitable enclosure, for perception to occur. This enclosure is provided by the “rest of the aggregate,” and it is in a relation of “sympathy” (or “co-feeling,” *sympatheia*) with the soul. There is, in the first place, the entire enclosure, which contains the whole animal; this is what enables the soul as a whole to initiate the process of perception, then pass it on to the enclosure as a whole. In addition, there are enclosures that exist as parts of the animal, enabling the soul to have particular kinds of sensory powers. These particular enclosures are dispensable; but if the enclosure as a whole is dissolved, the soul is dispersed and there is no more perception.

In this summary, Epicurus speaks only abstractly of the whole and parts, without naming any particular organ of perception. This makes the entire exposition convoluted and hard to follow. Fortunately, Lucretius makes things clearer in his more expansive account. Take the organ of sight, for example. The eyes provide a suitable enclosure, enabling the soul within it to be configured in such a way as to initiate sight and pass on the power of sight to the eyes as a whole. The important point is that the eyes see as a whole: starting with the fourth unnamed component of the soul, the power of sight is passed on to the rest of the soul within the eyes, then to the blood

and fleshy parts of the eyes. The whole organism both is the cause of sight and has sight. Just try to remove the eyes, Lucretius suggests, as though they were just doors through which the soul sees: the soul should be able to see better, with door posts removed (3.359–69).

The same applies to the rest of the sense organs. Each is configured in such a way as to house a certain arrangement of soul atoms, having a particular power of perception. Whereas sight, hearing, taste, and smell are localized in a particular part of the bodily complex, touch belongs to the body as a whole. The animate body as a whole is a sense organ, endowed with the sense of touch; it also has specialized powers depending on the configuration of its parts.

The reader may well be surprised that Epicurus gives no separate attention to the mind (*dianoia*) as a part of the soul. Although he refers to thought (*dianoêsis*) as one of several powers of the soul, his brief explanation of the soul contains no mention of a division of the soul into two parts, the mind and the rest of the soul. This is in contrast with the much more detailed treatment of Lucretius in the third book of his poem. Lucretius pairs the mind (*animus*, also called *mens*, 3.94) with the soul (*anima*) as parts of the human being (3.96 and 3.131) from the very beginning of his discussion. More precisely, he divides the soul as a whole into two parts, the mind and the rest of the soul (3.142–51).<sup>6</sup> Whereas the rest of the soul extends through the whole body, the mind is situated in the middle of the chest, or heart. Lucretius describes the mind as a kind of control center (*regimen* at 3.95, corresponding to the Stoic *hêgêmonikon*), having the power of deliberation (*consilium*, 3.95 and 3.139). Likewise, other sources speak of the soul as divided into a rational (*logikon*) part, situated in the heart or chest, and a non-rational (*alogon*) part.<sup>7</sup>

Again, there is no incompatibility between the two accounts. Although Epicurus does not single out the mind in his explanation of the soul, he indicates that the power of thought, too, depends on a certain bodily enclosure. The mind is another part of the soul that owes its special powers to its union with a certain type of bodily container. The reason that Epicurus does not single out the mind, or indeed any particular sense organ, is that his aim is to give a general explanation of how the soul comes to have any powers at all, with a special focus on sense perception: since the soul is a body that depends for its powers on the rest of the body, it is dispersed when the rest of the body is dissolved, with the result that there is no longer

any perception. This explanation applies to all animals, not just humans. At the same time, it provides a physical explanation for the ethical truth that death is nothing to us; for there is no longer any perception. By contrast, Lucretius is concerned with the particular structure of the human soul, with a special focus on its rationality.

What, then, distinguishes the mind from the rest of the soul? Only human beings have reason, or more precisely “calculation,” *logismos*.<sup>8</sup> The human soul can, therefore, be divided into a rational and a non-rational part; but this division can be misleading. In the first place, the human mind has a variety of non-rational powers, along with rationality. At the most basic level, the mind contributes more to the preservation of life than any other part of the soul.<sup>9</sup> Further, it has images—both in dreams and when awake—that occur without any rational process; in this respect, it functions as a sense organ. In addition, it has memory, which does not require reason. Finally, it initiates movement, another power that does not require reason. In humans, the mind can control these functions by the use of reason. It is appropriate, therefore, to call it rational as a whole. What the rational mind directs, however, is an assortment of non-rational powers within it. Instead of dividing the human soul, therefore, into a rational part (mind) and a non-rational part (all the rest), it would be more accurate to view the entire human soul (including the mind) as a seat of non-rational powers, varying from one bodily part to another and joined in the chest by rationality.

A related problem is that the division tends to obscure the continuity between humans and the rest of animal life. Although only humans have reason, this does not imply that only humans have mind.<sup>10</sup> Contrary to a strong Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, which assigns mind (*dianoia*) only to humans, Lucretius explicitly assigns mind (*mens*) to horses and deer (2.265, 2.268, 3.299); he cites the former as initiating the movement of their bodies in the mind, the latter as feeling panic in the mind.<sup>11</sup> Lucretius (4.987–1010) also assigns dreams, a function of the mind, to a variety of animals: race horses dream of running races; hunting dogs dream of pursuing stags; and birds dream of the attack of hawks. In general, there is evidence of an attempt by the Epicureans to bridge the gap between humans and other animals by imputing analogous powers to non-rational animals. Thus Epicurus speaks of memory or something analogous;<sup>12</sup> Philodemus attributes to non-rational animals something analogous to mental distress.<sup>13</sup>

Philodemus also notes that voluntary movement requires foresight and expectation or something analogous.<sup>14</sup>

Given that some non-rational animals have some mental functions, it seems reasonable to assign mind to them, as Lucretius did, although some Epicureans might have preferred to speak of what is analogous to the mind. In any case, some non-rational animals, too, have a rich mental life, even if they cannot reason out what is happening to them. Just as animals, taken as a genus, partake of a continuum of sensory powers, so they partake of a continuum of mental powers, depending on their corporeal structure. This is a gradualist view of differences among animal species. Humans are shaped differently from other animals: that is why they have rationality. They have nothing to thank for their rationality except the particular structure of the chest and heart. They are a particular kind of chested animal—that's all. If horses could have chests like humans, they too would have rationality.

In conclusion, there is a unitary soul, joined with the rest of the bodily complex into a single animate being. The soul has a variety of functions, which depend on the kind of body in which it is enclosed. Touch belongs to all animals as the basic type of sense perception. In addition, animals may have one or more of the other senses, each with its own bodily organ. There are also mental functions, which are located in the chest. Only humans have rationality; but other animals, too, have mind or something analogous to it. Animals as a whole have a range of psychic functions from minimal perception to rationality, with some functions being analogous to others. All animals have the same goal, pleasure, but are equipped differently for accomplishing this goal.

This is an especially animal-friendly system of philosophy, second, perhaps, only to Pythagoreanism during antiquity. Lucretius's poetry gives poignant expression to this sentiment. At its basis is a unitary view of the animate being as a corporeal composite of body and soul. For the human being, happiness is not just a state of soul, but consists of a smoothly functioning adjustment of body and soul. What happens to a foot, or the stomach, or any part of the whole, makes a difference to one's well-being; in the case of humans, reason offers a powerful way of controlling these events.

## SENSE PERCEPTION



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So far, we have considered the functions of the soul only in a very general way. In this section, I shall examine sense perception, with special attention to sight and the sensory powers of the mind. As a combination made out of atoms, an animal is continually being bombarded by atomic movements from outside. How does it discriminate anything from out of this barrage of atoms? And how does it organize this information within itself? As I shall argue, Epicurus developed a theory of attention to deal with the complexity of sensory and mental stimulation: the animal selects what it becomes aware of by an act of attention called *epibolê* (Latin *iniectus*, etymologically, “a thrust on”).<sup>15</sup> Through successive acts of attention, an animal gradually acquires mental patterns that result, in the case of humans, in rationality.

First, a word on terminology. The term that I translate as “sense perception” is *aisthêsis*. An alternative translation, which is often used, is “sensation.” I prefer “sense perception” (or “perception” simply) because Epicurean *aisthêsis* is not merely sensation: it is a form of judgment. The organ of perception, acting as an organ of judgment (*kritêrion*), discriminates its proper objects, such as a certain color or shape (in sight), or sound (in hearing), and so on. Epicurus paired “sense perception” (*aisthêsis*) with “feeling” (*pathos*) as the two kinds of evidence by which we determine whether a belief is true or false (*Ep. Hdt.* 38, cf. 63, 68, and 82). In this pairing, “sense perception” is directed at objects other than one’s own condition, whereas a “feeling” is the awareness of one’s condition. In what follows, I shall deal only with sense perception, leaving feelings until my fourth section.

Epicurus explained sense perception as a response to an influx of atomic streams into the organ of perception. In the case of sight, a continuous stream of thin layers of atoms, called *eidôla* (“semblances”), is emitted from the surface of solids, reaching from the solid to the eyes. Though very thin (so that they cannot be seen by themselves), these configurations can preserve the shape and color of the solid as they travel to the eyes; sometimes distortion occurs. Sight occurs as a result of *eidôla* entering the eyes in very rapid succession. Other kinds of streams are responsible for hearing and smell; taste and touch are due to an immediate contact with the perceived object.<sup>16</sup>

What enters the sense organ depends on the condition of the sense organ. The organ must have channels that are commensurate with what enters.<sup>17</sup> If the organ is in distress—that is, if its channels are in disarray—it will not receive the same influxes as when in a healthy condition. So a sick person may taste honey as bitter although it is normally sweet; that is because the sensory channels are disturbed in such a way as to meet up with the roughly shaped atoms in the incoming stream rather than those that are smooth.<sup>18</sup>

When an arrangement of atoms enters the sense organ, it produces a “presentation” (*phantasia*). For its part, the sense organ is not merely passive: it responds to the impact of atoms from outside by an act of bringing into focus an object of perception. This act is called *epibolê*, literally “a thrust toward” a thing. It is an “act of attention” in the sense of “attending” to an object of awareness; in modern terminology, it is an act of intentionality, directed at an intentional object. As far as our sources show, Epicurus was the first philosopher to use the term *epibolê* in this technical sense. In his view, whatever we grasp with our senses by an act of *epibolê* is without error; for it is free from any interpretation; it is just what is presented from outside (*Ep. Hdt.* 50–51). Importantly, the presentation occurs without any conceptual input. The senses, by themselves, have the ability to discriminate their proper objects. Conceptions are formed subsequently out of these raw, uninterpreted objects of cognition.

Sense perception, then, is an act of attention, *epibolê*, produced by the interaction of an organ of perception with an influx of atoms. What complicates this theory is that Epicurus assigned the same type of process also to the mind. At its lowest cognitive level, the mind functions just like a sense organ, specifically the organ of sight. Whenever the mind thinks of anything, it responds by an act of *epibolê* to *eidôla* that enter it from outside. These *eidôla* are just like those that enter the eyes, with two differences: they are much finer and not all of them come from the surface of bodies. Because they are especially fine, they are susceptible to combining with other *eidôla* in midair so as to form a composite arrangement; *eidôla* can also form spontaneously in midair.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the mind can think of perceptible objects such as a table or chair, as well as of fantasy objects such as a centaur or a pink elephant. Contrary to Platonic tradition, we do not draw on thoughts that are stored, as it were, within ourselves. Instead, we make a selection from the vast possibilities of thought created by the atoms outside us. Whenever we think of anything,

we direct our attention to objects newly presented by atoms entering from outside.

How can this theory be at all plausible? In the case of atomism, a visual theory of thought seems to run into absurdity. And so some ancient critics thought. Lucretius admits there are a lot of questions, and he tackles them with gusto. So he asks, with a sarcasm that mimics the scorn of his critics: How can we think of anything we please—the sea, sky, battles, banquets—whenever we please? Do *eidôla* wait on our will and come as soon as we want? And what about dancing figures, such as we see in dreams? Have the *eidôla* been trained to put on a nocturnal spectacle by learning to coordinate their movements so smoothly?<sup>20</sup>

Lucretius's answers throw further light on the process of attention. His explanation has two parts, corresponding to the two causal components of sense perception: external stimuli and the response of the organ of perception. In the first place, the number of *eidôla* moving about at any time in any place is so huge that we can think of virtually anything at any time. In the second place, the mind sees sharply only what it “strains,” or “has prepared itself,” to see; the rest is lost from its awareness. By “preparing itself” and expecting what comes next, it comes to see it (4.802–806). Lucretius compares the preparation of the mind to that of the eyes whenever they strain to see something small. They cannot see a tiny object accurately unless they “strain and prepare themselves.” Even in the case of readily visible things, the object is “as though removed forever and far away” unless “one pays attention” (*advertas animum*). Likewise, the mind “loses everything except what it is given to” (4.807–15).

What accounts, then, for mental vision is a huge availability of possible visions together with a state of alertness. The latter causes the mind to make a selection from the range of possibilities. The same happens in the case of sight, or (as implied) any other sense organ. In the case of the five senses, the range of possibilities is not nearly so great, nor is the complexity of self-preparation. But, just as in the case of the mind, the organ selects its objects on the basis of a certain state of self-preparation, or straining, consisting in the opening up of channels that permit the entry of certain types of atomic complexes. The straining is obvious in the case of objects that are barely perceptible; but there is also some degree of straining in all cases of perception. The organ sees clearly only those objects for which it is prepared by some element of straining. We feel the straining of the organ

only when it is especially intense. But it exists as a state of alertness at the level of atomic composition whenever we perceive. Otherwise, we do not bring anything into focus at all.

The next question is: what accounts for the “self-preparation” that is needed to produce a clear presentation? We may note at the outset that, as a process belonging to the organ of perception, the kind of self-preparation described by Lucretius is not a voluntary movement. The self-preparation of the mind as an organ of perception is no more voluntary than the self-preparation of the eyes. The organ itself is constituted in such a way as to bring an object into focus. An organ’s process of self-preparation might indeed be initiated by an act of volition; but this type of act (as will be discussed later) is a different function of the mind from that of perception, nor is it necessary to the process of perception. If a thought escapes us, or if a thought keeps obtruding itself on us against our will, we might form an act of volition, seeking either to capture the thought or else to stop it. It is an important principle of Epicurean ethics that we have the ability to control our thoughts by acts of volition; but this is a different kind of self-preparation, involving the individual as a whole, from the self-preparation of the organ of perception. As we shall see in the final section of this chapter, it raises problems of its own.

The opening of channels in one organ may trigger openings in other organs. We are told by one source, Diogenes of Oenoanda, that after the first impacts of *eidôla* on the eyes, a path is opened which allows the mind to receive similar *eidôla* even when the seen object is no longer there.<sup>21</sup> Presumably, pathways are opened up from the sight organ into the mind, creating channels within the mind that allow it to receive *eidôla* of its own, showing the same object directly from outside. Such pathways may persist for a long time. In the case of dreams, as Lucretius explains (4.973–77), intense and long occupation with certain activities during the day leaves channels in the mind that receive *eidôla* of the same kind during sleep. The same process explains memory. Through repetition of sensory experience, passages become embedded in the structure of the mind, allowing the mind to recall objects through the reception of similar *eidôla*.

In general, the opening of channels may take a very complex form. Just like the eyes, the mind sees not only stationary but also moving things. This is especially amazing; but here, too, the mind operates in the same way as the organ of sight. In the case of sight, the organ puts together rapidly

arriving, stationary *eidôla* into a moving figure. Similarly, the mind can focus on an extremely rapid succession of stationary representations—each having a slightly different pose from the preceding one—to see a group of smoothly coordinated dancers.<sup>22</sup> It sees this succession through a network of passages that receive the incoming atoms in imperceptibly fast succession. Again, there is no need to suppose anything voluntary about the successive activation of passages. Just as the mind sees stationary figures through channels that were previously opened up by sense experience, so it sees moving figures by a complex network of slightly varying passages that were previously put in place by sense perception. This is cartoon animation, produced by the mind just as by sight.

Depending on the pathways within it, then, the sense organ or mind focuses on only a tiny part of the information that is available to it from the outside. In response to a continuous bombardment from outside, the interior channels block many atomic configurations from entering, impede others, and admit others freely. Channels keep opening up in response to what is admitted. Where there are more channels receiving more atomic influxes of the same kind, there is greater alertness, resulting in greater clarity of awareness. There is intensity, or straining, within the organ whenever one has a clear presentation. In agreement with atomic physics, this is not, strictly speaking, the tightening of a tension, but an accelerated process of collision. Where there is little activity, there is just a vague awareness. In sight, for example, there is focused vision, which is clear, and peripheral vision, of which we are barely aware. Analogously, the mind sees clearly only what it strains to see; the rest exists on the periphery of awareness. In Lucretius's words, the mind "loses" all the rest. The loss may be total unawareness, or just a vague awareness, consisting in a failure to focus. This range of possibilities suggests a theory of the subconscious; and this has important implications for ethics, as we shall see in the next section.

Whenever the mind acts like a sense organ, focusing on an object as presented from outside, the act of *epibolê* is described as "presentational" (*phantastikê*). That is because it obtains a presentation (*phantasia*), just as the five senses do. There is no need to add the qualifier "presentational" to the acts of the five sense organs; for all of them are necessarily presentational. The "presentational attention" of the mind is the first step in a cognitive process that leads to other kinds of attention; like any other sensory act of attention, it is not an act of reason.

Epicurus's choice of the term *epibolê* to signify an act of intentionality fits atomic theory. In ordinary usage, the meaning of the term ranges from "assault" to "attempt" or "intention." Instead of connoting a dynamic continuum (as Greek *enteinein/entasis* or Latin *intendere/intentio* do), it suggests the propulsion of one entity upon another. Underlying the intentional act of focusing on an object of perception is the propulsion of one configuration of atoms on another. To invoke Lucretius's battle imagery, one army of atoms (the configuration of channels in the organ of perception) throws itself upon another (the configuration of incoming atoms). Cicero used both the etymological counterpart *inicere* and the more general term *intendere* ("strain") to translate *epiballein*.<sup>23</sup> In a broad sense, the two terms have the same meaning; both signify the directing of attention to an object.

## BELIEF

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The human mind is not merely a kind of sense organ; it also has rationality. As the seat of rationality, it can add beliefs to what is presented from outside. To form a belief (*doxa*), we take "another motion within ourselves which is attached but has a distinction (*dialêpsis*)" (*Ep. Hdt.* 51). There is a succession of movements: first, there is an act of perception, which is prompted from outside; next, there is an act of interpretation, originating within ourselves. Though "attached," the new motion is not simply a continuation of the act of perception. It differs in two ways. At the physical level, the movement of belief originates within us, instead of being imposed from outside. Cognitively, the object of belief does not match the object of perception. The act of perception is said to be "non-rational" because it neither moves itself nor, insofar as it is moved by another, does it have the capacity to subtract or add anything.<sup>24</sup> A belief, by contrast, is rational insofar as the mind adds or subtracts something by a movement of its own. Unlike the object of perception, the belief admits of being either true or false.

The truth of beliefs is discussed elsewhere in this volume. Here, I shall focus on what happens in the mind. In order to add a belief, it is necessary to have a preconception (*prolêpsis*) of what is added. This is an assumption



that exists “prior” (*pro-*) to the formation of the belief. Suppose I have a presentation of a bent oar (a much cited example), and I add the belief that the oar, which is partially submerged in water, really is straight. I need a number of preconceptions, including a notion of “straight.” Lucretius tells us how we can have a mental image of “straight” right away. What he does not tell us, however, is what makes us connect the conception corresponding to this image with the presentation. Following Lucretius, we may suppose that as soon as the visual organ transmits the sensory perception to the mind, the mind is prepared to add a conception. But which conception? Or why add a conception at all? If I have an entrenched belief (that bent oars are really straight, for example), the mind will be structured in such a way as to admit the same joining of images as previously. But what happens when I first form a belief, or change a belief? Is our mental circuitry such that it allows us to form new beliefs without any change of structure? Or does the mind somehow create a new structure?

I shall return to this problem in the last section of the chapter. For now, let us have a closer look at preconceptions. A preconception is another type of *epibolê*. Just like sensory discrimination, it is an act of attention to something clear.<sup>25</sup> Unlike sensory discrimination it contains some degree of judgment about sensory presentations. It is said to be “something like” a “correct belief,” or “a universal thought,” consisting of “a memory of what has often appeared from outside.”<sup>26</sup> At some point in our experience, memories of similar particulars turn into a general conception. As a sort of belief, a preconception differs from the beliefs we form by means of preconceptions. Necessarily correct, it serves along with sense perception and the feelings as one of the three standards by which we determine truth and falsehood.<sup>27</sup>

A prominent example is the preconception of god as an indestructible, blessed, living being (*Ep. Men.* 123). In this case, we direct our mind conceptually to three salient features, namely indestructibility, blessedness, and living being. Using the translation *iniectus animi* to designate this type of *epibolê*, Lucretius (2.739–47) illustrates it by the preconception of a colorless object. We form this preconception as a result of repeatedly perceiving objects in the dark, just like blind persons. In general, the mind forms a preconception by focusing on sensory particulars in such a way as to pick out universal characteristics.



One might object that what is presented to the mind from outside is always a particular thing—a particular horse, for example, never a generic horse. This is another challenge to the visual theory of thought. The answer lies, once again, in the ability to select what one attends to. The mind selects not merely sensory particulars, but also universals. As Diogenes Laertius (10.33) points out, “as soon as the word ‘human being’ (*anthrōpos*) is spoken, the outline (*typos*) of it is thought of by preconception.” The “outline” consists of the salient features that make up the human being as a type. There are no *eidōla* that present just the generic human being, stripped of any contingent properties. The generic properties are picked out conceptually from the particulars that are presented.<sup>28</sup>

Equipped with both sensory awareness and preconceptions, we form two kinds of belief. One kind concerns what is not presently perceived, but can be perceived (as illustrated by the belief about the apparently bent oar); the other concerns what cannot be perceived (whether subperceptible, such as the atoms, or beyond the range of perception, such as the weather on the moon). In the first case, the mind enfolds a present object of sensory awareness within a preconception in such a way as to situate it within an objectively existing, perceptible order of things. The belief is verified or falsified by further observation. In time, we acquire a detailed conceptual map of the perceptible “nature” of things. In the second case, we use preconceptions to extend our knowledge beyond the perceptible order of things. Suppose I form the belief that there is void in addition to bodies (*Ep. Hdt.* 40). This belief is confirmed by the argument that bodies would not move, as perceived, without there being void. Further argument shows that bodies are ultimately atomic. I now have two conceptions about what cannot be perceived: those of atoms and void. Additional investigation produces many more such conceptions, for example, of the infinity of the universe, or the parts of atoms, or the atomic swerve.

Just like preconceptions, conceptions about imperceptible things are acts of attention, *epibolai*. Cicero describes the mind as “thrusting” (*iniciens*) itself into the universe without ever finding a boundary.<sup>29</sup> Here the object of attention is the infinity of the universe. When Lucretius (1.69–74) tells how the “vigorous force” of Epicurus’s mind broke open the barriers of the world and traversed the universe, he is offering a poetic version of *epibolê*. In Epicureanism, soul travel is a rigorously rational affair: the mind

constructs an intricate chain of reasoning, checked by reference to sensory perception, so as to discover the hidden structure of the universe.

Apart from void, the basic objects of attention are bodies and their properties. As Epicurus explains in the *Letter to Herodotus* (68–73), these properties are of two kinds: permanent and incidental. The former make up the whole body and always accompany it; the latter accompany it only upon occasion. We may illustrate the former by the property of rationality in the case of a human being, and weight in the case of an atom. Incidental properties may be exemplified by slavery, laughter, or walking in the case of a human being; and a collision or swerve in the case of an atom.<sup>30</sup> Permanent properties are said to have “certain distinctions (*dialêpseis*) and acts of attention (*epibolai*)” (*Ep. Hdt.* 69); incidental properties are also said to have *epibolai* (*Ep. Hdt.* 70).

Epicurus elsewhere uses *dialêpsis* in the sense of distinguishing spatial parts (*Ep. Hdt.* 57–58). This is a different sense from that of distinguishing properties. Properties are distinguished from other properties or from the wholes to which they belong; or they are distinguished as one of two types, permanent or incidental. Whenever one distinguishes anything, there is an act of attention. Concerning bodies in general, one may direct one’s attention to the whole body, or a permanent property, or an incidental property, or a spatial part; and one may direct one’s attention to either a particular object or a type. Acts of attention begin at the sensory level, then are transformed into conceptual acts. With the formation of preconceptions, a person has learned to distinguish permanent from incidental properties. Confronted with a particular object, one recognizes the general type by focusing on the permanent features that make up the preconception.

In addition to focusing on things of the world, one may focus on texts that tell about the world. Epicurus makes prominent use of this sense of *epibolê* in the *Letter to Herodotus* as he urges the reader to give comprehensive attention to his doctrines and to commit them to memory (*Ep. Hdt.* 35–36 and 83). An Epicurean is attentive to the facts, as taught by Epicurus, throughout his life, ready to recall them at any time. The preparation of the mind culminates in a thoroughgoing philosophical preparation. This is what allows a person to meet every exigency by immediately calling to mind the appropriate doctrine.

Paying attention is a method of selection; and to practice it correctly, one must know both what to select and how to attend to what has been selected.

Epicurus and his followers aimed to direct the student's attention to things they considered essential to happiness. This is not simply a matter of showing the way, but of overcoming resistance. Philodemus speaks of people "pushing away acts of attention (*epibolas*) to death," so that when it comes clearly into view, it catches them by surprise.<sup>31</sup> As Lucretius (3.37–58) sees it, people put on a mask, claiming to know that there is no life after death. Deep down, however, they are infected by a fear that drives them to extremes of irrational behavior. Likewise, Diogenes of Oenoanda (fr. 35. col. 2) distinguishes between clear fears, such as a fear of fire, and vague fears, sunk within one's nature and lurking in the depths, while one turns one's mind to other things. Such deeply sunk fears contaminate one's mind, like a vessel, spoiling everything that enters it.<sup>32</sup> Lucretius pushes, pulls, cajoles, and chides his readers into giving full attention to the object of their fears, just as he does everything to shock obsessive lovers into a recognition of the reality of their situation.

Along with paying attention to some things, one must know not to pay attention to others. An important example is that of diverting attention from experiences that are painful to those that are pleasant. Epicurus famously demonstrated this precept on his deathbed when, suffering from the extremes of a gastro-intestinal disease, he professed delight in the memory of past philosophical conversations.<sup>33</sup> In general, one should pay "the most continuous attention (*tên synechestatên epibolên*) to past, present, and future goods."<sup>34</sup> Another way of practicing selection is to avoid preoccupation with insoluble problems, such as trying to figure out the precise causes of distant events, particularly those in the heavens (*Ep. Pyth.* 85–88). Regarding such events, it is enough to know a range of possible causes; for this is sufficient for happiness. To seek the precise cause is, at best, a futile endeavor; at worst, it brings about pain and distracts us from paying attention to what matters.

In a discussion that involves sophistic quibbles, Epicurus talks of paying attention to the universal instead of the particular.<sup>35</sup> It is easy to see how one might get entrapped by a sophist as a result of not paying attention to relevant distinctions. There is much more at stake, however, than just losing an argument. Epicurus held, for example, that pleasure as such is a good; but not every pleasure is to be chosen as a good, since some pleasures lead to an excess of pain. Taking a particular pleasure as a good, without

calculating how much pain it might cause, is a quick path to unhappiness. Here, it is crucially important to attend to particulars. On the other hand, there is a limit to the search for particularity, both in theoretical and practical reasoning. In planning an action, we may need to act on the assumption that a belief will be confirmed subsequently, without knowing the particulars in advance.<sup>36</sup>

In conclusion, Epicurus developed a comprehensive theory of cognitive attention. Whenever a sense organ perceives, or the mind thinks of, anything, it “attends to” (*epiballei*) an object. Mental acts of attention comprise both non-rational acts of sensory awareness, such as imagination and dreams, and the conceptual recognition of the entire range of what exists. What one attends to may be a universal or a particular, or a whole body or a property of it, whether perceptible or imperceptible. Every act of attention is an act of selecting from a vast range of possibilities. Picking out the right things and being prepared to call them to mind at any time is of fundamental importance to happiness.

The use of the term *epibolê* (*epiballein*) became very common among ancient philosophers of various persuasions after Epicurus.<sup>37</sup> Entering the general philosophical vocabulary, the term was used to designate the cognitive act of focusing on an intentional object, regardless of theoretical explanation. The “thrust” of directing one’s attention was no longer tied to atomic theory. Like the Epicureans, other philosophers distinguished between sensory and conceptual acts of attention.<sup>38</sup> They also distinguished between simple and composite *epibolai* of the mind, the latter involving more than one intentional object.<sup>39</sup> The term was used frequently to refer to the act of picking out different aspects of a single entity, or, to put it another way, picking out intentional aspects of a single extensional entity. Thus Aristotelian *archê* was said to be, according to different *epibolai*, both a beginning and a cause.<sup>40</sup> Augustine’s use of *intentio*, I suggest, corresponds to Greek *epibolê*. Although Augustine repudiated Epicurean materialism, his theory of intentionality appears indebted to a Greek tradition that owes not just the word, but a comprehensive theory of attention, to Epicurus.<sup>41</sup>

## MOTIVATION: FEELINGS, EMOTIONS, AND ACTION

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We now turn from our experience of the world around us to our experience of ourselves. The primary topic will be the “feelings” (*pathê*), which consist in an awareness of our own condition. As previously mentioned, Epicurus paired them with sense perceptions (*aisthêseis*) as the two types of evidence by which we infer what is not presently experienced (*Ep. Hdt.* 38). This is a cognitive function. We must, therefore, backtrack briefly. Just like sense perceptions (which are directed at objects other than one’s inner condition), feelings (directed at one’s inner condition) do not admit of falseness. Feelings are divided into two main kinds, pleasure and pain;<sup>42</sup> and whenever we feel pleasure or pain, there really is something pleasant or painful within us. We go wrong by adding beliefs. Thus, I might add the belief that a present feeling of pleasure will persist in the future: this belief is confirmed or disconfirmed by another feeling, which occurs subsequently. Or I might infer, on the basis of having feelings throughout the body, that soul is spread throughout the body. This is an inference about a state of affairs that cannot be experienced directly and so needs to be confirmed or disconfirmed by argument. Just as in the case of perceptions of external things, I may select certain feelings for my attention: thus I may attend to the feeling of pain in my toe or the fear I feel in my mind, or try to divert attention from them.

The feelings, however, have another function besides a cognitive function. In addition to serving as a standard of truth, they serve as a standard of action. All animate beings experience pleasure as something akin to themselves, hence good, and pain as something alien, hence bad. Pleasure and pain are therefore the “yardstick” or “rule” (*kanōn*) by which all acts of choice and avoidance are judged.<sup>43</sup> This constitutes a fundamental difference between sense perceptions (*aisthêseis*) and feelings (*pathê*). Although feelings may accompany perceptions, feelings alone comprise an attitude, pro or contra, concerning the object of awareness. To attend to something pleasant entails being attracted to it; to attend to something painful entails having an aversion from it.

This section will focus on the feelings as a standard of action. This entire area has provoked much controversy among scholars. By way of a preliminary, I shall lay out some basic assumptions, all of which are subject to disagreement. First, Epicurean *pathê* are not simply passive conditions

(*pathê* in the most general sense), but felt conditions, in short “feelings.” Otherwise, they could not have the two functions assigned to them. Second, as Cicero reports, whenever we have a feeling, it is a feeling of either pleasure or pain; there is no middle ground.<sup>44</sup> Third, Epicurus divided pleasure into two kinds: “katastematic,” or the pleasure belonging to a settled condition, and “kinetic,” or pleasure belonging to a mobile condition. In the case of katastematic pleasure, the atoms move in normally smooth patterns, without any painful disruption. In the case of kinetic pleasure, there is a pleasurable agitation, or excitement, of atoms. Fourth, katastematic pleasure consists in the absence of pain and is the height of pleasure; kinetic pleasure does not increase pleasure, but merely varies it.<sup>45</sup> Fifth, pain and pleasure as a whole are divided into two kinds: of the body (or “bodily”), and of the soul (or “psychic”).<sup>46</sup>

Concerning the second point, Epicurus’s way of delimiting pleasure and pain seems counterintuitive. Ordinarily, as Epicurus’s opponents pointed out, we think of the absence of pain as a condition that is intermediate between pleasure and pain, not as a pleasure, let alone the height of pleasure. On the traditional view (with which I agree), Epicurus extended the meaning of pleasure to include the feeling of an absence of pain.<sup>47</sup> We feel pleasure when we simply feel comfortable or relaxed. Epicurus’s theory of attention (*epibolê*) gives plausibility to this position by explaining how the feeling occurs. Just as an act of sense perception requires an act of attention, so an awareness of a pleasure or pain requires an act of attention. If we ignore our condition, we have only a vague, unfocused awareness; the feeling of pain or pleasure is, as it were, lost to us. If we do pay attention, we have a clear feeling. In the case of katastematic pleasure, we feel a certain kind of pleasure as the result of giving attention to it; otherwise, the feeling is lost to us. Nor is it absurd to suppose that this is the height of pleasure. We might object that we go for kinetic pleasure—sex, a gourmet meal, mental exhilaration—as something preferable to the mere absence of pain. Epicurus concedes that a desire for kinetic pleasure is natural so long as it is not based on false belief; but he insists that what we go for in such cases is not really an increase, but a variation.

For the rest, I will focus on the fifth point, the division of pleasure and pain into those of the body and the soul. To begin with, what are pleasures and pains of the body, as opposed to pleasures and pains of the soul? The



nomenclature can be misleading. Any type of feeling at all originates in the soul; hence feelings of the body, too, may be ascribed to the soul. What makes the difference is the type of thing that both feels and is felt. In the case of bodily pleasures and pains, this is a composite of body and soul, consisting of soul together with its bodily enclosure (as discussed in the first section); and it may be either the whole animate body or a part of it, including any particular sense organ. This composite is what both feels and is felt. It is called “body” on the assumption that it is the body (or bodily part) of an animate being. In the case of psychic pleasures and pains, the soul in itself feels a condition of itself, separately from its bodily enclosure.

This division forms the basis of a set of correspondences. Corresponding to pain of the body (*algein*) is psychic distress of various kinds (*tarbein*, *tarattesthai*, *lupeisthai*).<sup>48</sup> Katastematic bodily pleasure, consisting of a lack of bodily pain (*aochlêsia*, *aponia*), corresponds to katastematic psychic pleasure, identified as a lack of anxiety (*ataraxia*).<sup>49</sup> Kinetic bodily pleasure corresponds to kinetic psychic pleasure; the latter is exemplified by joy (*chara*).<sup>50</sup>

Let us consider, first, the pleasures and pains of the body. They tend to be associated with the flesh (*sarx*). Three of Epicurus’s *Authoritative Opinions* (*KD* 4, 18, and 20) refer to the pleasure or pain of the flesh.<sup>51</sup> Although it is possible to understand “flesh” narrowly to refer to the type of bodily complex that serves as the sense organ of touch, it is preferable to take it to refer to all five sense organs, on the ground that what primarily perceives and feels in all cases is the flesh, as animated by soul.<sup>52</sup> In any case, all sense organs feel both pleasure and pain. Taking the sense of taste as a paradigm, Lucretius explains that the tongue and palate feel pain when an influx of rough, hooked atoms breaks up their pathways, and pleasure when there is an influx of smooth and round atoms.<sup>53</sup> The latter is a kinetic pleasure. As has been widely noticed, Lucretius does not appear to give an example of katastematic pleasure with reference to any particular sense. However, he may be taken to offer a general explanation of sensory katastematic pleasure, applying to all sense organs, when he explains that the return of atoms to their normal patterns, after being disrupted “throughout the flesh and limbs,” produces “a soothing pleasure” (*blanda voluptas*, 2.963–66).



The sense of touch differs from the other senses in that it is stimulated not only from outside the animate body but also from inside; in both cases, its proper object of perception is “body,” as Lucretius points out (2.435). An example of pleasure is that of sexual arousal, when a certain type of body—semen—is generated from within (2.433–43). In the case of hunger and thirst, pain is produced by a weakening and inflammation (respectively) of the bodily structure (4.860–76). Notoriously, Epicurus is said to have called the pleasure of the stomach the “beginning and root of good.”<sup>54</sup> This claim may be understood by reference to the corresponding desire. According to Epicurus’s classification of desires (which will be discussed shortly), the desire for food and drink fits the most basic type of desire, the desire for life. The pleasure of the stomach may therefore be regarded as a basic kind of pleasure, underlying all other pleasures as a prerequisite for the rest.

Lucretius (4.710–21) offers an especially intriguing example of visual pain. In the case of lions, roosters emit semblances (*eidôla*) that stab the pupils in such a way as to produce pain, making the lion flee. This is a good example of the difference between feelings of the body and those of the soul. The soul of a lion (as shall be discussed shortly) is constituted in such a way as to feel anger, as opposed to fear. When a lion sees a rooster, his eyes experience a feeling that overrides the feeling of anger that the soul would feel on its own. Instead of feeling angry, the lion flees—not out of fear, but out of bodily pain.

Next, I turn to the feelings of the soul. How do they differ from those of the body and from each other? The Stoics offered a very intricate classification, consisting of four main types of irrational emotions or “passions” (called *pathê*, a term often translated as “emotions” simply) and three main types of rational feelings (*eupatheiai*); and they linked the former with false belief, and the latter with knowledge. The Epicureans did not offer nearly as tidy a classification. This does not, however, imply a lack of coherence. They offered their own classification by dividing the *pathê*, in the first place, into feelings of pleasure and pain, then extending them to both the body and the soul. Psychic feelings correspond roughly to “emotions.” Although these feelings have something in common with Stoic *pathê* and *eupatheiai*, the Epicureans proposed their own way of managing them in order to attain their own distinctive goal, pleasure.

It is helpful, at the outset, to add some examples to the set of correspondences outlined above. These examples suggest an order of

priority. Epicurus's "fourfold remedy" (*tetrapharmakos*, consisting of the first four *Authoritative Opinions*) implies four main kinds of psychic pain: fear of the gods, fear of death, fear of pain, and excess desire. Indeed, Diogenes of Oenoanda explicitly divides the "feelings that trouble the soul" into these four kinds, calling them the "roots of all ills."<sup>55</sup> These "roots" may be distinguished from secondary types of psychic pain, such as grief, hatred, fear of poverty, fear of disgrace, fear of punishment, lust for power, obsessive sexual desire, and so on. Correspondingly, there are four main kinds of katastematic psychic pleasures, consisting of a lack of disturbance about the gods, death, pain, and one's desires, together with many secondary kinds.

As for kinetic psychic pleasure, there are various kinds of joy (*chara*). Epicurus puts the following at the top: "a settled condition of the flesh and firm expectation of it provides the highest and most secure joy for those able to reason out the matter."<sup>56</sup> Concerning both physical and psychic pain, we take "unsurpassed delight" (*gêthos*) in having escaped a great evil.<sup>57</sup> Lucretius (2.1–13) illustrates the delight of escaping psychic pain when he claims that there is nothing more pleasant than to be in a position, protected by the fortress of wisdom, to look down on those struggling for honor and wealth below. This is not Schadenfreude, but gratitude for one's own escape from evils. We also take delight in bestowing favors on others. Lucretius's exuberant joy at making Epicurus's teachings accessible to others through poetry (1.921–50) is an example of this kind of pleasure.

Lucretius and Philodemus, along with later sources, cite fear and desire together as causes of psychic distress.<sup>58</sup> This pairing corresponds to the Stoic classification of fear and desire as the two kinds of passion concerning the future. The overlap, however, is a surface feature of Epicurean doctrine; and it is best understood as fitting a context of inter-philosophical debate. Proposing pleasure as the goal of life, the Epicureans offered their own diagnosis of what stood in the way of this goal, together with remedies on how to remove these obstacles.<sup>59</sup>

What, then, is distinctive about Epicurean psychic feelings? As a bearer of cognitions, the soul feels its condition as informed by cognitions. What is this condition? As the examples indicate, the soul feels pain at having certain wrong beliefs and receives pleasure in having correct beliefs. To have beliefs is a rational function of the mind. Accordingly, Epicurus (*KD*

18) contrasts the pleasure of the flesh with the pleasure that the mind generates for itself by making the right calculations. Another source contrasts bodily feelings of pain, which concern only the present, with the greater amount of pain that the soul feels in relation to past, present, and future.<sup>60</sup> The ability to extend pain in this way appears to depend on belief about the past or the future.

It is worth asking, however, whether psychic feelings are necessarily tied to belief, or whether they may also belong to certain non-rational functions of the mind. The Stoics offered a clear answer. They held that the irrational emotions, *pathê*, are necessarily joined to belief. At the same time, they differed among themselves on how they are joined. Zeno is said to have held that the *pathê* supervene on (*epiginomenai*) belief, whereas Chrysippus identified them with belief.<sup>61</sup> Galen, who reports this distinction, associates Epicurus with Zeno.<sup>62</sup> Philodemus lends support to this testimony, for he speaks of “feelings in the soul that attend (*parakolouthounta*) because of our wrong beliefs.”<sup>63</sup> Concerning anger, Philodemus draws a distinction between the feeling (*pathos*) itself, which is “distressing (*lupêron*) or analogous,” and the combination of feeling and disposition (*diathesis*). As a type of pain, the feeling is something bad; viewed in conjunction with a disposition, however, it may be something good. If the disposition is good, so as to have correct beliefs about punishments and harm, the feeling is good; otherwise not.<sup>64</sup> The feeling as such is bad, but insofar as it follows on a correct belief it is good.

This does not yet answer, however, whether the Epicureans held that all psychic feelings are joined to belief. As discussed previously, the mind has both non-rational and rational functions. The former include presentations, imagination, dreams, and memory; and non-rational animals share in them. What is to prevent a non-rational animal or a human being from responding with a feeling of psychic pain or pleasure to a mere association of images, without belief? Philodemus attributed a feeling analogous to mental distress to non-rational animals. Lucretius goes further. In his explanation of the composition of the soul, he extends feelings of anger and fear to non-rational animals, while assuring humans that they can overcome any natural predisposition to one kind of emotion or another by the use of reason (3.289–322). The whole explanation offers an intriguing insight into the material basis of the emotions.

Let us, then, consider Lucretius's analysis in some detail. As we saw, the soul has four kinds of components: heat, wind (breath), air, and a fourth unnamed kind (3.231–87). The first three kinds, Lucretius explains, correspond to three kinds of emotion. There is psychic heat whenever the mind boils up in anger and the eyes flash with anger; cold breath accompanies the fear that stirs limbs; and air belongs to the chest and face whenever they are placid (3.288–95). Placidity is intermediate between anger and fear. The three components are mixed in different proportions in different species of animals, as well as in individual humans, with the result some species or human beings are more prone to anger, others to fear, and others to placidity. A preponderance of heat, for example, makes lions prone to anger; a preponderance of wind makes deer fearful; and a preponderance of air makes cattle placid (3.296–306). Likewise, in the case of humans, the proportion of components makes one person turn more quickly to anger, another to fear, and so on. The proportions vary greatly among humans, with the result that their “natures” are attended by a huge variety of habits, exceeding existing names (3.316–18). Humans, however, can counteract their natural predispositions by the use of reason. Although the “first imprints (or ‘footprints,’ *vestigia*) of the nature” of the mind cannot be rooted out (3.307–10), it is possible to diminish their effect to insignificance: “the imprints of natures (*naturarum vestigia*) that reason cannot dispel are left so small that nothing prevents us from living a life worthy of the gods” (3.320–22).

According to Lucretius, then, humans and non-rational animals share a range of feelings, demarcated by anger and fear at both ends, with placidity placed in the middle. These feelings are said to originate in the mind or the chest. The natural proportion of components in the soul makes the animate being, whether rational or non-rational, prone to a certain kind of feeling. Humans differ from other species in having a huge variety of natural predispositions. The fundamental difference, however, is that humans have the ability to control their natural inclinations by the use of reason, thus all but effacing the “imprints” of their natures. Their inborn “natures” persist; but if one looks for their tracks, so to speak, they are all but gone. Reason has stopped the natural proportion of soul constituents from having any but the slightest effect.

Lucretius poses a challenge to humans: do not simply give in to your natural inclinations, as determined by the atomic constitution of the soul;

control your nature by the use of reason. This challenge is based on a recognition of two kinds of psychic feelings: responses without belief, dependent on the natural constitution of the soul, and responses that depend on belief.<sup>65</sup> Non-rational animals have only the first kind of feeling; humans have both. The Stoics subsumed the first kind under the general heading of *propatheiai*, feelings prior to *pathê*. An Epicurean such as Philodemus might have preferred to regard the first kind as analogous to the second, thus restricting the scope of the term *pathos* in line with Stoic terminology. Whatever the terminology, however, Lucretius's analysis attests both the reality of non-rational psychic feelings and their ethical importance. Like animals, humans are prone to psychic feelings without belief; and these feelings are subject to control in the case of humans. There is no reason not to impute this basic view, together with a broad use of the term *pathos*, to Epicureanism as a whole.

Interestingly, Lucretius's analysis offers a material explanation for the sort of feelings that Plato assigned to one part of his tripartite soul, the spirit, *thumos*. In the case of the Epicureans, the nature of the soul as a whole accounts for a full range of feelings associated with the spirit, from extremes of aggressiveness to extremes of timidity. How are these feelings related to desire, *epithumia*, another part of the Platonic soul, or the totality of emotions? It is tempting to suppose that, on the Epicurean view, a degree of aggressiveness or its opposite, shirking, belongs to every act of pursuing pleasure or shunning pain. The mixture of soul atoms provides the motive force that allows an animate being to realize its inborn inclination for pleasure and aversion from pain. In the case of humans, reason can control this motive force. All three functions belong to a unitary soul, as blended out of a mixture of atoms.

Taking Lucretius as a guide, then, we may divide psychic feelings into feelings with or without belief. How does this position square with the role of the feelings, *pathê*, as a standard of truth? How can feelings that follow on belief be exempt from falsehood, when a belief (as Epicurus held) admits of being either true or false?<sup>66</sup> The answer, I suggest, lies in distinguishing the feeling from the cognitive condition on which it follows. As something that follows on belief, the feeling is neither identical with belief (as Chrysippus supposed) nor a constituent of belief. Whether or not it follows on belief, the feeling is just as unalterable as a sense perception or bodily feeling; for it cannot move itself, nor does it add anything to or

subtract anything from movements produced by something else. The belief on which a feeling may follow is an act of interpretation, added from within; but the feeling is not—it cannot be otherwise than as it is. Lucretius offers an example of how psychic feelings, even when they follow on belief, serve as a standard of truth: the feeling of joy or fear in the chest, he asserts (3.141–42), is evidence that the mind is located in the chest. The inference is based on the fact that there really is a feeling of joy or fear in the chest; the existence of such feelings is not in doubt. Along with serving as a standard of truth, psychic feelings have special importance as a standard of action. The misery that we feel when we fear death or the gods is an unalterable fact, and so is the pleasure that comes from eliminating these fears. Both kinds of feelings serve as a standard for regulating our lives: naturally constituted to seek pleasure and avoid pain, we must do all we can to eliminate psychic pain no less than bodily pain.<sup>67</sup>

Just like bodily pains, psychic pains cannot be avoided altogether. Further, they must sometimes be sought out; for they are just as much subject to a hedonistic calculus as bodily feelings. Philodemus illustrates both points in his discussion of anger. First, it is inevitable for humans, as something belonging to them by nature, to feel anger.<sup>68</sup> Not to feel anger is a sign of moral perversion or madness.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, it is necessary to confine anger within natural bounds. Second, just as some bodily pains (such as medical treatment) should be chosen to avoid future pain, so moderate anger helps to eliminate future pain through appropriate punishments.<sup>70</sup> According to Philodemus, one should inflict punishment not as something to be enjoyed, but as if undergoing surgery or drinking wormwood; paradoxically, the angry person assumes pain himself in order to avoid pain in the future.<sup>71</sup>

Epicurus's analysis of desire (*epithumia*) offers a guide on how to manage all the emotions. Desires are divided into natural and unnatural, and natural desires are divided into necessary or unnecessary.<sup>72</sup> The result is three kinds of desire: natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary, and unnatural and unnecessary. The last kind is “empty,” for desires of this kind are based on wrong, or “empty,” beliefs, so as to bring more pain than pleasure. Natural and necessary desires are in turn divided into three kinds: necessary for life, necessary for lack of pain in the body, and necessary for happiness.

One example is the desire for possessions, or means of sustenance. The basic contrast is between “natural wealth” and that of “empty opinions” (*KD* 15). In addition, natural wealth may be divided into property that is necessary (beginning with the necessity of having enough to live on) and the kind that is unnecessary. Philodemus’s “natural desires for more [possessions]” fit the category of natural and unnecessary desires.<sup>73</sup> As Philodemus argues, a moderate person “inclines in his will (*boulêsei*) toward a more affluent” way of life.<sup>74</sup> Having more provides a margin against not having enough; but a wish for more must be strictly limited against wanting ever more. Set off by boundaries on either side, the category of natural and unnecessary desires offers a range of choices; an individual may select among them, depending ultimately on how he wishes to vary his pleasures.<sup>75</sup>

There is ample, even if unsystematic, evidence that the classification of desires applies to the full range of emotions. Fear of the gods and fear of being dead are “empty,” since they are based on wrong beliefs. But fear of dying, for example, spans the entire spectrum. Fear of extinction, we may suppose, is necessary to the preservation of life. For the rest, Philodemus offers detailed advice on what sort of fear about death is natural and what is unnatural. He holds, for example, that it is naturally painful to leave behind loved ones who will be in distress;<sup>76</sup> it is foolish, on the other hand, to be pained at the thought of not having a lavish burial.<sup>77</sup> There is nothing wrong, we may add, with being more fearful than others, so long as there is moderation. In the same way, some persons will be more angry than others; this is natural. Other kinds of emotion, such as grief, shame, pity, regret, hatred, and indignation fit the same pattern. They, too, appear inevitable to some degree; they admit of a range of optional feelings; and all must be avoided in excess.

As discussed in the previous two sections, one must focus attention on some things, while diverting it from others. This lesson applies with special force to the feelings, whether of the body or of the soul, since happiness is a state of feeling. There are two methods: one is to divert attention from pain to pleasure; the other is to remove pain by replacing wrong beliefs with the right ones. It is fundamentally important to know which method to apply. In the case of emotions that arise from false beliefs, it is disastrous not to pay attention; if suppressed, they simply fester within, spoiling all our joys. For



the Epicureans, philosophical therapy consists, in the first place, in bringing our emotions to the forefront of our attention, so as to purge those that are harmful and delight in those that are beneficial.

Last, I turn briefly to the topic of action. Feelings prompt action, in addition to being truthful. Lucretius is our main source on this topic; and he deals with voluntary movement rather than deliberate action. Using walking as an example (4.877–906), he distinguishes between two stages: first, a representation of walking; and, second, the volition (*voluntas*). The mind first sees what it will subsequently desire to do. The volition, consisting in the desire to walk, impels the atoms of the soul throughout the body; the soul atoms then strike the body. Lucretius does not mention the addition of belief to the image of walking. Though dealing with humans, therefore, his analysis is applicable to non-rational animals as well. It provides a template, as it were, into which belief may be inserted.

He provides an example of non-rational voluntary movement in his analysis of the movement of racehorses in his proof for the swerve. Citing the eagerness with which the horses rush from the starting barriers, he argues that there would be no “free volition” (*libera . . . voluntas*, 2.256–57) without a swerve. In agreement with his analysis of walking in Book 4, he situates the volition in the mind and has it initiate a motion that is subsequently passed on to the whole body (2.269–71). The argument is extremely controversial (and is treated elsewhere in the following chapter in this volume). Not least among the problems is that “free volition” is associated with non-rational animals, acting without belief.

In sum, Epicurus divided the feelings (*pathê*) into pleasure and pain, and assigned them to both body and soul. Feelings are of paramount importance in Epicurean ethics as the standard by which we determine action: acting on the basis of present pleasures and pains, which are necessarily true, we aim to attain the goal of pleasure. Pain is inevitable in both body and soul; but we can control it by the formation of correct beliefs in such a way as to enjoy a life of pleasure.

## SELF-DEVELOPMENT

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So far, we have looked at the ways in which humans experience the world and themselves; and we have touched on how they act in the world. It remains to consider their ability to shape themselves. This question takes us back to their physical nature. As complexes of atoms and void, do humans have any control over what they do as personal agents, or “selves”; or is everything they do determined by the physical laws that govern the movements of atoms? Do humans “themselves” determine what they do or become?

Unlike his atomist predecessor, Democritus, Epicurus held that phenomenal entities have an existence of their own. Democritus claimed that phenomenal entities, such as sweet, bitter, and so on, are mere appearances, having no existence of their own; only atoms and void exist.<sup>78</sup> By contrast, Epicurus proposed that there are two kinds of entities: the ultimate constituents of things, atoms and void, together with their properties; and the phenomenal things and properties that are created out of atoms and void.<sup>79</sup> A stone, a cow, a human being, and their properties exist no less than the atoms that compose them.

Given this two-tier ontology, the question arises: are phenomenal entities wholly explainable by the properties of the atoms and void? Or do they have causal powers of their own, which can act “from above” on the atoms that constitute them? Sedley has argued for the latter position, which may be called “radically emergentist.”<sup>80</sup> Against this view, two main objections have been made.<sup>81</sup> One is that it undermines Epicurus’s theory of causation; for, instead of recognizing atoms and void as the sole causes of what there is, it introduces new causes at the level of the phenomena. The other is that it lacks sufficient evidence. In what follows, I shall focus on the primary piece of evidence that has been cited. It provides a tantalizing glimpse of Epicurus’s notion of the self.

This piece of evidence consists of a fragmentary stretch of text, Book 25 of Epicurus’s *On Nature*.<sup>82</sup> Here Epicurus argues that there is a cause which consists “in ourselves” (*di’ hēmōn autōn*). The problem is: how can “oneself” be distinct from the atoms, if one is made up entirely of atoms? Epicurus’s answer is full of obscurities, due partly to abstruse language, but mostly to the fact that there is no continuous text.

I shall begin by setting out three oppositions that appear clearly in the text. They are: between the atoms and “what has been created,” or

“products” (*ta apogegennêmena*);<sup>83</sup> between one’s original constitution and one that is growing;<sup>84</sup> and between having the cause “in themselves” and having it in one’s original constitution together with one’s surroundings and the inflow of atoms.<sup>85</sup> The original constitution, as well as the growing constitution, are said to consist of both atoms and what has been created.<sup>86</sup>

In contrast with the atoms, we may surmise, “products” belong to the realm of phenomena. Epicurus seems to sum up the latter as “actions, thoughts, and dispositions.”<sup>87</sup> They include memory or an analogue, calculation, and beliefs.<sup>88</sup> I shall call a “growing” constitution one that is “developing.” This development is twofold, occurring at both the level of the atoms and the level of the products.

What, then, is it to have the cause within oneself? I shall consider three main texts, each of which admits of a variety of interpretations. On balance, I shall suggest, they do not support an emergentist (in a radical sense) line of interpretation. Epicurus, it seems, distinguished between two kinds of development: one that follows necessarily on the original constitution; and one that may depart from it. In the latter case, the cause lies within the developing individual, not the atoms. Despite this difference, there is no reason to suppose that what the individual does, as a cause, is not fully explainable by the atoms.

The first text deals with the case when an individual does something, by reason of “oneself,” that is “similar” to a bad original constitution:

If he undertakes something similar to his original constitution, which is bad, because of the cause that comes already from himself, we sometimes rebuke him still more, though by way of admonition, and we do not absolve him as we do wild animals by combining the products (*apogegennêmena*) and the constitution alike into a single thing.<sup>89</sup>

Epicurus here draws a contrast between wild animals, who are exempt from blame, and others who are subject to blame because the cause comes “already” from themselves. In the case of wild animals, we regard the original constitution and the products as a single entity, thus exonerating them from blame. Wild animals, it appears, cannot help but act in accordance with their original constitution. By contrast, when someone has reached the stage of acting “from himself,” we blame him for following a bad original constitution. In this case, we do not treat the products and the original constitution as one; instead, we distinguish between the original

constitution and the products. The term “already” indicates a stage of development when the individual—a child, let us say, or an animal who is beginning to be tamed—is no longer constrained by the original constitution. Just previously in the text, Epicurus mentioned that “when someone progresses in age,” the sort of thing that is produced is not by necessity but comes from oneself.<sup>90</sup> In the fragment just cited, the individual is blamed for persisting in his original constitution—throwing a temper tantrum, perhaps, or throwing one’s rider.

The second text distinguishes between two kinds of causes, atoms and products:

Many [animals?] have a nature that can accomplish both this and that, but fail to accomplish it on account of themselves (and not because of the same cause consisting of the atoms and of themselves), whom we especially fight against and blame...having an initially disorderly nature, as in the case of all animals. For the nature of the atoms did not contribute to some of their deeds and the magnitude of their deeds and dispositions, but the things that have been created (*ta apogegennêmena*) have acquired the whole or main cause of these [results].<sup>91</sup>

Again, there is a situation of blame. Epicurus attributes to many animals (or products, as some scholars supply) the natural ability to accomplish something that they failed to accomplish, and he blames them for this failure.<sup>92</sup> The failure is due to the individuals (or products) “themselves,” not the atoms; for individuals (or products) and atoms are not one and the same cause. The “nature of the atoms” contributes nothing to some deeds or their magnitude, or to the magnitude of their dispositions; instead, the products are entirely, or mainly, responsible.

What, then, does the difference between the “(nature of the) atoms” and the products consist in? Let us recall Lucretius’s claim that humans can reduce the “imprints of [their] natures” to tiny traces. Persisting from birth, these “imprints” consist of a certain proportion of the types of atoms that make up the soul; Lucretius also calls them “first imprints.” These imprints make certain individuals prone to anger, others to fear, and so on. Although they cannot be eradicated, we can dispel them sufficiently, through the ruse of reason, to live a life worthy of the gods.<sup>93</sup> In the cited passage, I suggest, Epicurus is drawing the same contrast between nature and responsibility, except that he joins tame animals to humans.

Let us take a naturally irascible individual. He has a preponderance of fiery atoms within his soul, persisting from birth. But he has also formed memories, a kind of “product,” that allows him to counteract this nature. If he is a human being, he may form the calculation that if he flares up in anger, he will fail to achieve his goal, pleasure. Suppose, then, that someone threatens to harm him: he might flare up in anger, or he might remain calm. The “nature of the atoms” that make up his soul is conducive to a flare-up of anger; the products can eliminate or diminish such a response. In the case of wild animals, as we saw, the response will necessarily follow on the original constitution of the soul. In other cases, however, the original constitution admits of either response. Acting “from himself,” an individual may act either on the basis of the “nature of the atoms” or on the basis of the products. Acting on the basis of products, he may remain calm, or calmer than he would be if he acted on the basis of the atoms alone; and his disposition may be more gentle than irascible. When we blame someone, we hold him responsible on the basis of the causal force of the products within him.

Third, we come to the crucial passage, which follows shortly after the one that has just been cited:

Thus, whenever something is created which takes on some difference (*heterotêta*) from the atoms in accordance with a certain method of distinction (*tina tropon dialêptikon*)—not the method [of distinguishing] as from a different area (*ou ton hōs aph’ heterou diastêmatos*)—it obtains the cause out of oneself. Next it passes on [the difference] immediately to the first natures and makes all somehow a single [cause].<sup>94</sup>

In brief, something is created that results in having responsibility from oneself. There is some obscurity in the referents: “it” (the subject of the two sentences) might be either the animal (or person) or the product; and what is passed on could be the product or the difference (as I prefer) or perhaps the cause. The various interpretations, however, admit of an underlying, general explanation. What is passed on unites with “the first natures” so as to combine “somehow” into a single cause.

The debate between an emergentist and non-emergentist position has centered on the interpretation of the first sentence. What is the “difference,” and what is the “method of distinction”? Sedley translates:

When a development occurs which takes on some distinctness from the atoms in a transcendent way—not in the way which is like viewing from a different distance—he

acquires responsibility which proceeds from himself.<sup>95</sup>

On this view, the created entity differs from the atoms in such a way as not to be causally reducible to them. It has “transcendent” (or “emergent”) properties that allow it to act on the atoms by way of “top down” causation.

There is, however, a simpler explanation, which not only saves Epicureanism from mysterious causal forces but also agrees with Epicurus’s usage elsewhere. As discussed previously in the section on belief, Epicurus uses the term “distinction” (*dialêpsis*) in two ways: one is to distinguish properties; the other is to distinguish one place from another.<sup>96</sup> In the cited passage, Epicurus immediately attempts to clarify what he means by “some method of distinction” by saying he doesn’t mean distinguishing one place from a different one.<sup>97</sup> What he means, I suggest, is a distinction of properties. This distinction consists in a “difference” from the atoms.<sup>98</sup> What is this “difference”? Just previously, as we saw, Epicurus argued that the atoms and what has been created are two distinct types of cause. What he meant there by the “(nature of the) atoms” is the congenital configuration of atoms that make up the soul. He now refers to this configuration as “first natures”; this is what Lucretius called “first imprints.” The “difference,” then, is between the sort of effect produced by the congenital nature of soul atoms, such as an outburst of anger resulting from a fiery configuration of atoms, and the newly created product, such as calmness.

The first cited text tells us about the opposite situation: that is, where the product is necessarily “similar” to the original constitution. In that case, there is no difference from the atoms nor any cause from oneself. If, on the other hand, the product differs from the congenital mixture of the atoms, the cause is from oneself. This is not a difference of place: the product is different from what might have occurred in the same place. If a person remains calm in the face of provocation, something has been created that differs from the sort of product that the congenital atoms would have created by themselves. There is no need to posit a sudden acquisition of new, “transcendent” powers. What is responsible is the creation of the sort of products that can make the difference. At a certain point in their development, the products are sufficiently complex to tilt the balance toward the creation of a difference from the original constitution. The

products act through their own atomic configuration to create this difference.

As soon as it is created, this difference is passed on to the congenital mixture of the atoms so as to merge into a single cause: this is the individual, acting from himself. The merging results in a modification of the composition of the soul, but it cannot change the original proportion of soul atoms. Through the continual creation of differences, the initial configuration of atoms will gradually diminish as a causal force, but it cannot lose its force altogether. Just like footprints, the initial imprints retain their outline, although they may become blurred. It is up to the individual, acting as a cause, to continue to create the sort of differences that prompt praise instead of blame.

That some non-rational animals should be held responsible is perhaps strange; but it fits ordinary experience, along with a gradualist view of differences among animals.<sup>99</sup> For Epicurus, memory or its analogue seems sufficient for acting “from oneself,” without the power of reason. Whereas others saw the training of animals as a form of conditioning, imposed from outside, Epicurus recognizes an internal shift, due to the animal itself. That is how race horses exemplify “free volition” (2.256–57 of Lucretius’s poem); they are themselves responsible for rushing from the barriers. The training of humans is continuous with that of non-rational animals, but reaches a new level of complexity through the acquisition of reason. Humans have the advantage that they alone have the means, reason, to attain a life “worthy of the gods.”

In conclusion, Epicurus proposed a materialist philosophy of mind that sought to explain cognition, emotion, and action without taking away responsibility from ourselves. There is a twofold thrust in his philosophy: one is to give a rigorously materialist explanation of the phenomena; the other is to inspire humans to take charge of their happiness. The two aims are both inseparable and in tension with each other. On the one hand, Epicurus strives to make absolutely clear that everything that happens is due to the movements of atoms in the void; this is what frees us from fear of the gods and death, along with other misconceptions that blight our lives. On the other hand, he focuses attention on ourselves as the cause of our happiness. The problem is: if we are nothing but atoms and void, how do “we” exist as a distinct causal entity? Epicurus’s answer is that “we” exist as a phenomenal entity, having numerous powers to create our happiness.



This chapter has attempted to set out the main psychological powers. Each of us is a unitary complex of body and soul, having the power to shape our feelings through our powers of cognition so as to attain the goal of pleasure. These powers, I have suggested, are fully explainable by our material constitution, without the need to posit any causal forces other than those of the atoms.

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations: Arr. = Arrighetti, *Epicuro. Opere*; L = Laursen, "The Later Parts of Epicurus, *On Nature*, 25th Book"; LS = Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*; DK = Diels and Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. For Lucretius, I use the numbering of Bailey, *Lucretius. De rerum natura*.

<sup>2</sup> In recent discussions, there has been a tendency to transliterate *psychê* instead of translating it as "soul." I use the traditional translation as a way of signaling the continuity of the Epicurean theory with other ancient discourses about the "soul."

<sup>3</sup> Sedley, "Epicurus' Refutation of Determinism" and "Epicurean Anti-Reductionism."

<sup>4</sup> *Ep. Men.* 127, 128, and 131. Lucretius uses "body" frequently as a shortcut for "rest of the aggregate" in his lengthy treatment of the soul in Book 3 of his poem.

<sup>5</sup> So Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, 138; and Morel, *Epicure. La nature et la raison*, 105; cf. Bailey, *Epicurus, The Extant Remains*, 227. Others (including Kerferd, “Epicurus’ Doctrine of the Soul,” 82; and Gill, “Psychology,” 126) take the sentence to refer to the whole soul.

<sup>6</sup> Lucretius repeatedly conjoins mind (*animus*) and soul (*anima*) as though they were complementary entities. As he makes clear at 3.143 and 150, however, the mind is part of the soul as a whole. *Anima*, or the part of it which is distinct from the mind, is often translated as “spirit.” This translation obscures the fact that the mind is part of the *anima* and has all the same powers, along with powers of its own.

<sup>7</sup> Usener 311 and 312, and Diogenes of Oenoanda fr. 37, col. 1.5–7.

<sup>8</sup> Cic. *ND* 1.48; and [Demetrius Laco, *The Shape of God*] cols. 14.11–15.7 Santoro.

<sup>9</sup> Lucr. 3.396–416.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle generally denies “mind” (*dianoia*, *nous*) to non-rational animals, but allows it to some at *On the Soul* 410b22–24 and elsewhere; see further Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*, 13. Although the Stoics did not assign “mind” (*mens*, *dianoia*) to non-rational animals, they attributed the directive part of the soul, *hêgêmonikon*, to non-rational animals as well as humans.

<sup>11</sup> See also Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, 135 and Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*, 28.

<sup>12</sup> Arr. 34.19, L p. 14, and Arr. 34.20, L p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> *On the Gods* 1, col. 11.33–35 Diels; cf. cols. 13.30–31 and 14.27–30; and *On Piety* 1.234–38 Obbink.

<sup>14</sup> Philodemus, *On the Gods* I, col. 13.16–22 Diels.

<sup>15</sup> The translation *iniectus* occurs just once, at Lucr. 2.740. Cicero uses the conjoined verbal forms *se iniciens et intendens* for *epiballein* at *ND* 1.54; cf. *intentam infixamque*, *ND* 1.49; and *intenta* simply at 1.105.

<sup>16</sup> *Ep. Hdt.* 47–53, and Lucr. 4.26–721. Although Lucretius uses the translation *imago* along with *simulacrum* (which captures the Greek brilliantly), the English translation “image” is misleading. The *eidôla* are simply atomic configurations—“little shapes” or “unsubstantial (ghostly) forms”; neither the configuration nor the object it presents is an “image” of another thing.

<sup>17</sup> *Ep. Hdt.* 49 and 53; Usener 250.

<sup>18</sup> Lucr. 4.655–72.

<sup>19</sup> Lucr. 4.722–67. The special fineness of mental *eidôla* implies that, even though the mind is composed of the same four types of atomic complexes as the rest of the soul, its atoms are especially fine.

<sup>20</sup> Lucr. 4.768–822, as reordered by Asmis, “Lucretius’ Explanation of Moving Dream Figures at 4.768–76.”

<sup>21</sup> Diogenes of Oenoanda fr. 9 col. 3.3–14.

<sup>22</sup> Lucr. 4.768–76.

<sup>23</sup> Cic. *ND* 1.54, cf. 1.49 and 105.

<sup>24</sup> DL 10.31.

<sup>25</sup> Usener 255; cf. DL 10.33.

<sup>26</sup> DL 10.33.

<sup>27</sup> DL 10.31.

<sup>28</sup> There is no need, therefore, to hypothesize an image created by a “superposition” of individual images, as suggested by Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*, 419.

<sup>29</sup> Cic. *ND* 1.54.

<sup>30</sup> See Lucretius's examples of the two kinds of properties (1.449–58). Contrary to Sedley, "Epicurean Anti-Reductionism," 312–15, I see no reason to exclude incidental properties from the atoms.

<sup>31</sup> *On Death* Henry 39.8–11.

<sup>32</sup> See *Lucr.* 6.22–23.

<sup>33</sup> *DL* 10.22 (Usener 138).

<sup>34</sup> *On the Gods* 3 col. d.25–27 (Diels).

<sup>35</sup> *Arr.* 31.19–20.

<sup>36</sup> *Arr.* 31.17 and 20.

<sup>37</sup> A striking exception is the Stoics, who assigned to *epibolê* the very narrow function of designating one of the elements that precede action (*SVF* 3.173), as exemplified in the definition of love (*SVF* 3.396, etc.); its meaning is something like "intention" (in the ordinary sense). Later authors used the term *epibolê* to explain Stoic intentional objects; this, however, is not a technical Stoic use. Thus, Sextus Empiricus (*S.E. M.* 7.251) writes about "attending to" all the unique features of an "apprehensive" presentation; and the Stoics are said to call the same thing truth, cause, nature, necessity, and so on, according to different *epibolai* (*SVF* 2.913).

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, *S.E. M.* 7.370 and *P.* 2.72 and 3.50.

<sup>39</sup> See *S.E. M.* 8.161–62 (on correlative objects) and Philoponus *In Arist. libros de anima commentaria*, *Proem* (Hayduck, *Philoponus In Aristotelis libros de anima commentaria* p. 2) (on demonstration).

<sup>40</sup> Alexander *In Arist. metaphys. comment.* 203 (Hayduck, *Alexander in Aristotelis metaphysica commentaria*, 247).

<sup>41</sup> Caston, "Augustine and the Greeks on Intentionality," 39 suggests that "selective attention" is one of the main features of Augustine's theory of *intentio*, and notes that "commentators have endlessly and (unconvincingly) sought it in earlier Greek philosophy." To my mind, all have overlooked the Epicureans. Ingenkamp, "Zur stoischen Lehre vom Sehen" and Todd, "Synentasis and the Stoic Theory of Perception" trace Augustinian *intentio* to Stoic *entasis* "intensification"; this interpretation overlooks the fact that one of the few testimonies (*SVF* 2.866) cited in its favor conjoins *enteinein* with *epibolê*.

<sup>42</sup> *DL* 10.34.

<sup>43</sup> *DL* 10.34 and *Ep. Men.* 128–29; cf. *Cic. Fin.* 1.30 and 2.31.

<sup>44</sup> *Cic. Fin.* 1.38.

<sup>45</sup> *Cic. Fin.* 1.37–39; cf. *KD* 3 and 18.

<sup>46</sup> *DL* 10.136–37; and Diogenes of Oenoanda fr. 44. The division is implicit in *Ep. Men.* 127–28.

<sup>47</sup> I follow Diano, "La Psicologia d'Epicuro e la teoria della passioni I"; and Rist, *Epicurus. An Introduction*, 100–14. Purinton, "Epicurus on the *Telos*," esp. 283–84, 300–302, followed by Erler and Schofield, "Epicurean Ethics," 653–56, has argued that we do not feel katastematic pleasure; instead, we rejoice in it (kinetically) as an object of pleasure. See further Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, 365–407, who reject the distinction between katastematic and kinetic pleasures; and Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 176–79 who takes Epicurus to identify genuine pleasure as the conjunction of an attitude and an object.

<sup>48</sup> *Ep. Men.* 128 and 131; *KD* 3 and 10.

<sup>49</sup> *Ep. Men.* 127–28 and *DL* 10.136; cf. *Lucr.* 2.16–19.

<sup>50</sup> *SV* 1. Wolfsdorf, "Epicurus on *εὐφροσύνη* and *ἐνέργεια* (*DL* 10.136)" has argued that *euphrosynê* designates kinetic bodily pleasure.

<sup>51</sup> See also Usener 410–12.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Lucretius's use of *viscera* in connection with all the senses at 2.964.

<sup>53</sup> Lucr. 2.398–407 (followed by a treatment of the rest of the senses, to 2.443) and 4.615–32; see also Usener 67.

<sup>54</sup> Usener 409.

<sup>55</sup> Fr. 34, cols. 6–7; cf. *KD* 10 and 11.

<sup>56</sup> Usener 68.

<sup>57</sup> Usener 423.

<sup>58</sup> Lucr. 5.45–46 and 6.25; Phld. *Peri oikonomias* col. 23.40–42; and Usener 203 and 485.

<sup>59</sup> As Konstan, *A Life Worthy of the Gods*, 27–77 has shown, fear and desire are intricately interwoven in this project.

<sup>60</sup> DL 10.137.

<sup>61</sup> SVF 1.209, 3.461.

<sup>62</sup> SVF 3.463.

<sup>63</sup> Phld. *De ira* col. 6.13–16. Philodemus also constructs an argument based on the assumption that anger “follows on” (ἐπακολουθεῖ) suppositions that precede (*De ira* col. 47.18–32).

<sup>64</sup> *De ira* cols. 37.24–39; cf. col. 27.19–23.

<sup>65</sup> Demetrius Laco (*On Poems* I, cols. 9–13 Romeo) mentions that certain kinds of *pathê* come to be “in accordance with the non-rational [part] of the mind” (κατὰ τὸ ἄλογον [δια]νοίας, col. 13.4–5, cf. col. 10.4–7). This happens in the context of judging a poem; but the gaps in the text make it difficult to pin down a precise meaning.

<sup>66</sup> Konstan, “Epicurean ‘Passions’ and the Good Life” and *A Life Worthy of the Gods*, 5–25 has raised this question as an objection against extending the term *pathos* to emotions joined by belief. He assigns the term *pathos* only to feelings that occur in the non-rational part of the soul as distinct from the mind.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Usener 311. According to Demetrius Laco (Puglia, *Aporie Testuali ed Esegetiche in Epicuro* (*P.Herc.* 1012). *P.Herc.* 1012, col. 47 = Usener 413) we feel the process of reasoning (*logizesthai*), as well as distress (*lupeisthai*), in the chest.

<sup>68</sup> *De ira* col. 40.18–27. The basic reason, it seems, is that we are naturally weak, so as to be prone to anger and favoritism (col. 43.29–36).

<sup>69</sup> *De ira* col. 38.20–29.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *De ira* col. 40.32–41.9.

<sup>71</sup> *De ira* col. 44.15–23.

<sup>72</sup> *Ep. Men.* 127, *KD* 29 and 30, SV 21, and Usener 456.

<sup>73</sup> *Peri oikonomias* col. 16.30–32.

<sup>74</sup> *Peri oikonomias* col. 16.4–6. Philodemus is here using the Stoic term (*boulêsis*) for the sort of desire that belongs to a wise person.

<sup>75</sup> On the types of desire, see further Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 190–98. I have argued elsewhere (“The Necessity of Anger in Philodemus’ *On Anger*,” 176–82) that anger, as a desire for avoiding harm, extends over the entire spectrum of desires.

<sup>76</sup> *On Death* col. 25.2–10; see further Armstrong, “‘Be Angry and Sin Not.’”

<sup>77</sup> *On Death* col. 30.7–11.

<sup>78</sup> DK 68 B 125.

<sup>79</sup> *Ep. Hdt.* 40 and 68–73; see Sedley, “Epicurean Anti-Reductionism,” 303.

<sup>80</sup> Sedley, “Epicurus’ Refutation of Determinism,” 38–43 and “Epicurean Anti-Reductionism,” 316–24; and LS 1.109–10. Mitsis, “Epicurus’ Ethical Theory” had argued for a traditional view of

bottom-up emergence, which he then subsequently defended against Sedley's top-down version in *Epicurus' Ethical Theory. The Pleasures of Invulnerability*, 160 ff by arguing that Sedley's view undermined causation at a micro level and that the passage could show at best indirect causal influence of macro on micro-states.

<sup>81</sup> See esp. Laursen, "Epicurus *On Nature* XXV (Long-Sedley 20, B, C and j)" and "The Later Parts of Epicurus, *On Nature*, 25th Book"; Annas, "Epicurus on Agency"; and O'Keefe, "The Reductionist and Compatibilist Argument of Epicurus' *On Nature*, Book 25."

<sup>82</sup> Since Arrighetti, *Epicuro. Opere*, the relevant portion of the book has been re-edited by Sedley as LS 20B, C, and j, and by Laursen, "The Later Parts of Epicurus, *On Nature*, 25th Book."

<sup>83</sup> Arr. 34.21, L p. 19. Sedley and others translate *ta apogegennêmena* as "developments"; I reserve the term "development" for the development of a constitution, consisting of both atoms and *ta apogegennêmena*.

<sup>84</sup> Arr. 34.20, L pp. 16–17.

<sup>85</sup> Arr. 34.27, L p. 35.

<sup>86</sup> Arr. 34.20, L pp. 16–17.

<sup>87</sup> Arr. 34.26, L p. 32.

<sup>88</sup> Arr. 34.20, L p. 16; Arr. 34.17 (Laursen, "The Early Parts of Epicurus, *On Nature*, 25th Book," 107); and Arr. 34.26, L 33.

<sup>89</sup> Arr. 34.25, L p. 31.

<sup>90</sup> Arr. 34.24, L p. 28.

<sup>91</sup> Arr. 34.21, L pp. 19–20.

<sup>92</sup> I follow LS 20B (2.105) in supplying "animals" as the probable subject. Contrary to Laursen, "Epicurus *On Nature* XXV (Long-Sedley 20, B, C and j)," 10 and "The Later Parts of Epicurus, *On Nature*, 25th Book," 57, I do not think that there is a compelling reason for supplying "products."

<sup>93</sup> 3.306–22.

<sup>94</sup> Arr. 34.22, L p. 22.

<sup>95</sup> Sedley, "Epicurus' Refutation of Determinism," 37; cf. "Epicurean Anti-Reductionism," 320 (with the translation "in a differential way" and "it acquires causation which proceeds from the self").

<sup>96</sup> Cf. O'Keefe, "The Reductionist and Compatibilist Argument of Epicurus' *On Nature*, Book 25," 175.

<sup>97</sup> So Purinton, "Epicurus on the Degrees of Responsibility," 164–66 and "Epicurus on 'Free Volition' and the Atomic Swerve," 293; followed by O'Keefe, "The Reductionist and Compatibilist Argument of Epicurus' *On Nature*, Book 25," 174.

<sup>98</sup> In my view, there is no need to translate "within the atoms," as most of Sedley's opponents have done; so Laursen, "Epicurus *On Nature* XXV (Long-Sedley 20, B, C and j)," Annas, "Epicurus on Agency," 56 n. 17; and O'Keefe, "The Reductionist and Compatibilist Argument of Epicurus' *On Nature*, Book 25," 173–74. The comparative sense "from the atoms" can stand.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Annas, "Epicurus on Agency," 54.

## CHAPTER 9

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# VOLUNTARY ACTION AND RESPONSIBILITY

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WALTER ENGLERT

Necessity (*ἀνάγκη*) is bad, but there is no necessity to live with necessity.

Epicurus *Vatican Sayings* 9

One who says that all things come about by necessity (*κατ' ἀνάγκην*) is not able to find fault with one who says that all things do not come about by necessity. For he says that this comes about by necessity.

Epicurus *Vatican Sayings* 40.<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

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THE goal of Epicureanism was to teach human beings how to look at the world so that we can attain happiness. According to Epicurus, there was only one way to do this: to see that the universe and everything in it—including all compound bodies, our own bodies and souls, and the gods—are made up of atoms and the void. Once human beings see the full implications of this, we are able to realize that all of our fears and anxieties (including the belief that death is an evil, that the gods will punish us here



or in an afterlife, and that pains are unendurable) are baseless, and that happiness, defined as the absence of pain, which is also the state of highest pleasure, or *ataraxia* (literally, “untroubledness”), is easy to attain. Epicurus taught that this life of happiness could be achieved by anyone who becomes an Epicurean and studies and lives by its doctrines.

What, though, if not everyone is able to benefit from Epicureanism? Epicurus argued against those who held that human thought and action might be constrained by necessity or fate so that it was impossible for us to be responsible for our own actions and to develop into the sorts of people we would like to be. If this were true, it would mean some of us, because of the characters we are born with and our experiences growing up, are the sorts of people who can become Epicureans and attain happiness, and others are not. Epicurus’s message of happiness would thus only be of value to a limited number of people.

We know from a variety of sources that Epicurus worried about these problems, and that he tried to address them by exploring the concepts of voluntary action and moral responsibility. Like some Greek philosophers before him, and particularly Aristotle,<sup>2</sup> Epicurus was deeply committed to the view that human beings are capable of acting voluntarily, are responsible for their actions, and are able to direct their lives towards happiness.

Closely connected to Epicurus’s views on voluntary action and moral responsibility was his highly controversial doctrine of the swerve of atoms (*παρέγκλισις* in Greek, *clinamen* in Latin), a tiny, random motion of atoms that occurs at no fixed time and place. Although the swerve is not mentioned in any of the extant writings of Epicurus, it is found in a number of ancient authors, and it is clear from their reports that it was Epicurus’s own doctrine.<sup>3</sup> The ancient source that describes the swerve’s role in Epicurean physics and ethics in the greatest detail is Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* (*DRN*) 2.216–93. As we will see, Lucretius’s description of the swerve is extensive, but unfortunately not detailed enough to allow us to gain a precise and universally accepted understanding of the swerve’s role in voluntary action. Many scholars argue that the Lucretius passage can be read to show that the swerve of atoms must play a role in every voluntary action of all living creatures, though they differ on the precise role the swerve plays. Other scholars argue that the Lucretius passage does not prove that the swerve plays a role in every voluntary action, and have made

suggestions about how the swerve was meant to preserve moral responsibility. Our other ancient sources besides Lucretius (including Cicero, Philodemus, Diogenes of Oenoanda, Galen, Plutarch, Plotinus, Augustine) help fill in the picture of the swerve, but do not settle the problem.<sup>4</sup>

Over the past half century many scholars have tried to solve the problem of the role the swerve played in Epicurus's account of voluntary action and moral responsibility. Scholars, on the basis of the ancient evidence, have come up with a variety of views, and no consensus view has emerged. Indeed, it seems the more studies that have been published on the topic, the more diverse the options for interpreting the swerve have become.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of the present essay is to discuss the main ancient texts that bear on Epicurus's notions of voluntary action, moral responsibility, and the swerve of atoms, and consider some of the ways they have been interpreted. I will proceed by examining the relevant ancient evidence first, and exploring what the issues were that our ancient sources show Epicurus and later Epicureans were concerned with as they thought about voluntary action, moral responsibility, and the swerve of atoms. I will argue that the evidence, especially Lucretius 2.216–93, favors the interpretation that Epicurus believed the swerve of atoms plays a role in every voluntary action of living creatures. But I also take seriously the views of scholars who disagree with this position, and I do not believe their views should be discarded entirely. Indeed, viewed from one perspective, the lack of scholarly consensus on the role of the swerve in Epicurean psychology and ethics provides strong justification for thinking that the precise role that the swerve played in Epicurus's analysis of voluntary action and moral responsibility is irrecoverable from the ancient evidence available to us.<sup>6</sup> But viewed from a different perspective, I will argue, the lack of scholarly consensus, combined with the plausibility of a number of different views about the role the swerve may have played in Epicurus's system, may point to a solution of a different kind. Rather than maintaining that the swerve played a *single* role in Epicurean psychology, as most scholars have assumed, it may be more productive to suppose that it played a number of roles. In what follows, I will argue that once Epicurus posited the swerve, he seems to have used it in a number of aspects of his psychology and account of voluntary action and moral responsibility.

Building on the views of previous scholars, I will argue that Lucretius's discussion of the swerve in 2.216–93 was not primarily designed to present a detailed account of exactly how the swerve functioned to preserve voluntary action and moral responsibility. Indeed, if that was Lucretius's purpose, he clearly failed. Rather, the passage was designed to argue for the *existence* of the swerve by pointing to aspects of the world around us (the existence of compound bodies, and the voluntary motions of all living creatures) that, according to Lucretius, would be impossible to explain without supposing some atomic motion like the swerve. Once Epicurus had established that the swerve exists with arguments like those Lucretius presents, he was able to use it to account for a number of issues, including sensation, consciousness, memory, and the ability of humans to develop their characters to be the sort of persons they wish to be as part of his arguments against necessity and for the existence of moral responsibility. In brief, I will suggest that rather than search for a single solution to the role the swerve played in Epicurus's account of voluntary action and moral responsibility, we are better off positing a number of roles for the swerve. This would mean that a number of modern theories about the role the swerve played to account for voluntary action and moral responsibility might be equally plausible and correct.

## SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

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Before looking at specific passages dealing with voluntary action and moral responsibility in Epicurus, we must discuss a more general question that has a direct bearing on our topic. What sort of an explanation was Epicurus likely to give of voluntary action, moral responsibility, and the swerve? Or asked another way, what kind of an atomist was Epicurus? In the last three decades, scholars have debated how best to describe Epicurus's account of the relationship of the atomic to the macroscopic realm, and the relationship of the ultimate principles of reality, atoms, and void, to the world of compound bodies we live in. In a recent account,<sup>7</sup> Tim O'Keefe has helpfully distinguished three possible views: eliminativism, reductionism, and anti-reductionism. In the context of ancient atomism, an eliminativist can be defined as one who believes that only atoms and the void exist and

are real, and that the visible world around us is not real in the same way; a reductionist as one who believes that both atoms and the void at the microscopic level, as well as compound bodies (including our minds) at the phenomenological level, are real and have causal efficacy; an anti-reductionist as one who holds that events at the phenomenological level cannot be reduced straightforwardly to events at the atomic level, and that compound bodies (including our minds) can acquire properties that are not completely reducible to atomic motions.

Although some scholars have argued that Epicurus was an anti-reductionist, I agree with those who argue that the ancient evidence points to the conclusion that Epicurus was a reductionist.<sup>8</sup> Unlike his predecessor Democritus, who appears to have been an eliminativist and held that the only things that truly exist are atoms and the void at the atomic level, Epicurus held that atoms and the void, and the world around us created from them, were both equally “real,” and that all of the properties and actions of the compound bodies in the visible world could be accounted for in terms of the properties, motions, and arrangements of their component atoms. If this is the case, any analysis of how Epicurus accounted for voluntary action, moral responsibility, and the swerve must involve an account that makes them explainable in terms of atoms and the void. This is significant, because if true, it means that the thoughts and actions of humans and all living creatures always correspond to and depend on the motions of the atoms that make them up, and that Epicurus would not posit qualities, occurrences, and actions in the mind or the physical world in general that could not be explained in terms of the properties and movement of atoms that compose them.

## NECESSITY AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY IN EPICURUS

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There are three major surviving texts of Epicurus that bear on the topic of voluntary action, moral responsibility, and the swerve: the *Letter to Herodotus* (*Ep. Hdt.*), *Letter to Menoeceus* (*Ep. Men.*), and the fragments of *On Nature* (*De Nat.*) Book 25.

In the *Letter to Herodotus* Epicurus provides a succinct account of the principal tenets of Epicurean physics. Since its main topic is physics, and not ethics, it is in one sense not odd that there is no mention of the topics of moral responsibility and voluntary action in it. It is striking, though, that Epicurus does not mention the swerve of atoms alongside the other two motions of the atom, those caused by weight and those caused by collisions, in sections 43–44 and 61–62. Scholars have proposed different explanations for this. Some have suggested that there is lacuna in the text where the swerve was originally mentioned,<sup>9</sup> while others have argued that Epicurus chose not to mention the swerve in the *Letter*, either because he did not want to emphasize it,<sup>10</sup> or because he did not consider it to be a continuous motion like the motions caused by weight and collision.<sup>11</sup> Still others have argued that Epicurus probably developed the doctrine of the swerve after he had composed the *Letter*.<sup>12</sup>

In his *Letter to Menoeceus*, Epicurus treats the issue of moral responsibility and what is in our power more directly. Near the end of the letter, Epicurus argues against the “fate of the physicists”:

Since who do you consider to be better than the one who . . . laughs at the fate which is introduced by some as the mistress of all, saying that some things happen by necessity (κατ’ ἀνάγκην), others by chance (ἀπὸ τύχης), others depend on us (παρ’ ἡμᾶς), because necessity (ἀνάγκην) is beyond our control, chance is unstable, and what depends on us (παρ’ ἡμᾶς) is without a master, and it is to this that blame and its opposite naturally are attached—since it would be better to follow the stories about the gods than to be enslaved to the fate (εἰμαρμένην) of the natural philosophers. For the former supports a hope that we can supplicate the gods by honoring them, while the latter involves an inexorable necessity (ἀνάγκην).

Although there are some textual difficulties in the passage,<sup>13</sup> it is clear that Epicurus is distinguishing the view of an all-controlling fate (εἰμαρμένη) introduced by natural philosophers (οἱ φυσικοί) from what he takes to be the correct view: that some things happen by necessity, some by chance, and some “depend on us” (παρ’ ἡμᾶς).<sup>14</sup> In Epicurus’s view, the concepts of “what depends on us” and of praise and blame are clearly incompatible with the view that fate or necessity controls everything. Although he does not go into detail about this threefold classification in this passage, Epicurus claims to leave room for necessity, chance, and what “depends on us,” i.e.,

moral responsibility. The letter is silent, though, about how Epicurus would explain each of the three categories in atomic terms.

By far the most important discussion of moral responsibility and ethical development in Epicurus's own writings is contained in Book 25 of his major work *On Nature*, a treatise in thirty-seven books that Epicurus composed over a period of many years. The book has been partially reconstructed from the papyri surviving in Herculaneum after the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE. The book, which has been identified as Book 25,<sup>15</sup> has survived in three different fragmentary exemplars.<sup>16</sup> Scholars have studied the work extensively in the past thirty years, and have made great progress, despite the poor condition of the papyri and obscurity of Epicurus's discussion, in establishing the Greek text and interpreting its meaning.<sup>17</sup>

The chief edition of the fragments of the book is by Simon Laursen, and the most complete recent studies are those of Francesca Masi and Atilla Németh.<sup>18</sup> In her detailed and thoughtful study, Masi has reviewed earlier treatments of Book 25, discussed its main themes, and presented a persuasive reading of what Epicurus was trying to accomplish in it.<sup>19</sup>

As far as we can tell from the extant fragments, the main purpose of Book 25 of *On Nature* was to discuss the formation and development of various mental states of human beings, including memory, self-perception and self-knowledge, the point at which we human beings can be said to develop reason, and the extent to which we are responsible for how our mind develops and for the way we act. In particular, in the course of this discussion Epicurus seems to be arguing against various objections, probably raised by some of the students in his school but traceable to Democritus and later members of his school, that humans are not responsible for their mental states, characters, and actions, and that everything happens by necessity.<sup>20</sup>

Many of the details of the discussion are obscure, but the major terms in which Epicurus frames the discussion are clear. As is well known, Epicurus taught that the mind and soul are corporeal, made up of very fine, smooth, and mobile atoms that through their motions and the way they interact with the atoms of the body create life in a living creature and are responsible for sensation, self-awareness, memory, and thought. In Book 25, Epicurus contrasts the individual atoms that comprise the mind and soul with the mind and soul taken as a whole, and in part of the argument discusses the



psychological development of human beings.<sup>21</sup> As part of his account, Epicurus uses various forms of the verb ἀπογεννάω (“to produce”), and in particular the perfect participle of the verb in the singular (τὸ ἀπογεγεννημένον) and plural (τὰ ἀπογεγεννημένα) in ways that make it clear that the term is central to his analysis. What is Epicurus trying to say about how humans develop as they grow up, and how much of this development depends on us or is out of our control?<sup>22</sup>

At birth, human beings have a “nature” (φύσις) which Epicurus describes as our “original constitution” (ἡ ἐξ ἀρχῆς σύστασις) and also as “the first constitution of both the atoms together with the original product” (ἡ πρώτη σύστασις τῶν τε ἀτόμων ἅμα καὶ τοῦ ἀπογεννηθέντος). As human beings grow, we experience many things from the environment through our senses, are affected by them, and change in response to them. At the same time, we gradually acquire mental concepts, language, and the faculty of reason. As a result of this process, our “original constitution” (ἡ ἐξ ἀρχῆς σύστασις) changes, in such a way that it can be described as an “increasing constitution” (ἡ ἐπαυξομένη σύστασις). For this intermediate stage Epicurus employs another form of the verb ἀπογεννάω, the present participle ἀπογεννώμενον, or “the developing product.”<sup>23</sup> During this intermediate period of development, we somehow become responsible for our own development and our actions, and are rightfully subject to praise and blame. We have the “cause from ourselves” (ἡ ἐξ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν αἰτία). At a yet later stage, our characters become fully formed, and we, or our characters, are described as “fully developed” (τὰ ἀπογεγεννημένα). At this point, when we have reached adulthood, our characters and the way we look at the world are fairly set, though not impossible to change.

With this basic framework in mind, we can examine six important passages from Book 25 to explore in more detail how Epicurus tries to explain the role we play in our own psychological and ethical development, and why his philosophical opponents who think that this development happens by necessity are wrong.<sup>24</sup>

#### *On Nature* Passage 1:<sup>25</sup>

... of the things resulting from the (atoms) having been forced together, but also (the atoms) having been forced together clearly in the same way. For having been forced together, the same (atoms) have the nature to produce (ἀπογ[ενν]ᾷ) such things and start on such a thing in accordance with the way of the same distance. And the original products (τ[ὰ]



ἀπ[ο]γεν[νηθ]έντα<sup>26</sup> ... [lacuna of a few letters] ... things happen in accordance with the way we have described and are able to cause (ἀπεργαστικά) the same things. But many (original products), having the nature to become causes (ἀπεργαστικά) of these things and those things because of themselves (δι' ἑαυτά), do not become causes (ἀπ[εργ]αστικά) (of them), not because of the same cause of both the atoms and themselves (οὐ διὰ τὴν αὐτὴν αἰτίαν τῶν τε ἁτόμων καὶ ἑαυτῶν), and with these especially we fight and rebuke, (thinking) that they behave in accordance with a nature disturbed from the beginning, just as in the case of all living creatures. For the nature of the atoms (ἡ τῶν ἁτόμων φύσις) has not assisted them at all in certain actions and in the magnitude of their actions and dispositions, but it is the developments themselves (αὐτὰ τὰ ἀπογεννημένα) that possess all or most of the cause (αἰτίαν) of some of these things, and it is from that that some of the atoms move with disturbed motions, not entirely because of the atoms ... the ones from those making their way in by necessity from the environment [into?] the natural [cause] ... being also the original constitution ...”

Given the condition of the text, the complexity of the grammar, and the obscurity of the terminology, scholars have differed in their interpretations of this section. The main outline of the argument, however, seems to be as follows: When (individual mind<sup>27</sup> atoms) are forced together in the body, they produce a new sort of entity, which is called an “original product.” These original products, under normal conditions, are able to become causes of different sorts of things, i.e. they are able to develop in a number of different ways, “because of themselves” (δι' ἑαυτά). The mind, then, because of this, plays a role in its own development, and can be seen as a cause, and is thus responsible for its own development. In some cases, though, this process seems to fail. The “original products” in this case seem not to allow for different types of development, and develop in one way. Epicurus says in such cases we still fight with and rebuke these individuals, thinking that the natures of their souls have remained, as if they were animals,<sup>28</sup> as disturbed as they were at birth, and have not developed. In such a case, Epicurus argues, it is wrong to absolve them of responsibility by blaming the “atoms and themselves,” implying, it seems, that it is not the nature of the atoms of the mind and soul that one should hold responsible, but rather the developments themselves, i.e. the way the mind has developed, that play the largest role in determining our actions and dispositions.

*On Nature* Passage 2:<sup>29</sup>

... at the same time fighting with many people and admonishing them, which is contrary to the necessary cause belonging to the same method. Thus, whenever something develops (ἀπογεννηθῆ) having some difference from the atoms in some way that is distinct (τὸ

λαμβάνον τινὰ ἐτερότητι [α τῶ] ὑ ἀτόμων κατὰ τινα τρόπον διαληπτικόν), not in a way as if from a different distance (οὐ τὸν ὡς ἄφ' ἑτέρου διαστήματος), it acquires the cause from itself (τὴν ἐξ [ἐ]αυτοῦ αἰτίαν) and it immediately distributes it as far as the first natures and somehow makes this all one. Whence also those who are not able to distinguish such things correctly create a storm for themselves about the judging of causes (περὶ τὴν τῶν αἰτίων ἀπόφασιν), and in the case of these very things we fight with and reproach and . . . some more and some less . . . not on account of the cause out of themselves (τὴν ἐξ αὐτῶν αἰτίαν) but (the cause) of the best actions and thoughts . . . then we do not fight with them at all, but they with themselves, since they join the cause with the atoms themselves. And although they hate the cause out of themselves (τὴν ἐξ αὐτῶν αἰτίαν) . . . or at least do not rebuke as many things as . . . if they still do not have what is common with the original . . . and briefly from the same causes . . .

This is one of the most frequently discussed passages from Book 25. Epicurus begins by describing how his opponents, who believe that everything happens by necessity, fight and admonish others, and he points out that this seems contrary to the belief that the people they are admonishing act out of necessity. Epicurus then describes how the mind “develops” in ways not completely determined by the atoms that make it up, and through this process can be said to “have the cause from itself” (τὴν ἐξ [ἐ]αυτοῦ αἰτίαν). Exactly how Epicurus thought this process works is difficult to tell. He states in the passage that as the mind develops, at a certain point it is able to take on what he calls a “difference from the atoms in some way that is distinct, and not in a way as if from a different distance.” David Sedley has argued that in this passage we can see evidence of Epicurus’s anti-reductionism, and he and others have suggested that there is a reference to the swerve in such language.<sup>30</sup> While Sedley’s view has stimulated valuable discussion, most scholars who have commented on the passage since Sedley have seen it as explaining how the mind somehow, as it develops, is able to bring about changes in itself, and then integrate those changes in a way that affects its own atomic makeup and integrates them into a unified whole. What sort of process Epicurus is describing here is perhaps best paralleled in a passage in Lucretius (3.288–322) where he explains human character development, and argues that no matter what type of atoms predominate in our minds, or what sorts of motions they take, we can still learn through reason (*ratio*) to reshape our minds so that we can attain happiness. Lucretius implies that reason allows us to reconfigure how our mind atoms move, so that, even if we cannot completely eradicate certain behaviors to which we are prone, we can reshape our thoughts and actions sufficiently to live a happy Epicurean life.

If our characters developed by necessity, it seems, the type of mind and soul atoms and the patterns of their movement would all either be fixed from birth, or if changeable, not be under our control. Epicurus, denying this, explains that our characters can develop, presumably at first under the influence of those like parents, teachers, and friends, and gradually through our own thoughts and initiative, by acquiring new patterns of movement that allow us to change our characters in ways that affect our behavior. As this passage shows, during part of this process, the development of the soul is able to affect the mind and soul atoms, making the change “one,” i.e. effective, again probably by creating new atomic arrangements and movements and making them permanent. This process, Epicurus thinks, is unfortunately overlooked by those who think everything happens by necessity. Not being able to judge causation well, they contradict themselves, and in effect “hate the cause out of themselves,” i.e., do not acknowledge nor take advantage of the fact that they can change their characters and actions.

### *On Nature* Passage 3:<sup>31</sup>

From the first beginning we always have seeds (σπέρμ[ατά] leading us, some towards these things, some towards those things, and some into both of these, of actions and of thoughts and of dispositions, both to a lesser and greater extent. Therefore it depends on us (παρ’ ἡμᾶς) at some point absolutely that the development (τὸ ἀπογεγεννημένον) has become this way or that way, and that those things flowing in by necessity through the pores from what surrounds us (τὰ ἐκ τοῦ περιέχοντος κ[α]τ’ ἀνάγκην διὰ τοὺς πό[ρο]υς ἐλόμενα) at some point depend on us (παρ’ ἡμᾶς) or rather on our own beliefs from ourselves (παρὰ τὰς ἡμετέρας [ἐ]ξ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν δόξ[ας]) . . .

This section seems to repeat some of the analysis from *On Nature* passage 1, describing how we have elements in our minds and souls that can develop in different directions. Because of this potential for developing our actions, thoughts, and dispositions in different ways, Epicurus argues that it “depends on us” at some point how our souls have developed. He is more specific in this passage, though, about what that means for us as we develop. Epicurus here indicates that once we have developed in a certain way, it affects our relationship with “those things flowing in by necessity through the pores from what surrounds us.” These “things” are apparently the atomic images that flow off all objects and impinge on our sense organs when we perceive anything, and on our minds when we think about anything.<sup>32</sup> In the latter case, the mind must selectively focus, by means of

the process called the “focusing of the mind” (ἐπιβολὴ τῆς διανοίας), on one object and not on all of the almost infinite images available to it.<sup>33</sup> Of all of the nearly infinite images our minds can focus on as we sense things through our eyes, ears, and other sense organs, and as we receive thoughts as we think, we in fact only focus on one particular stream of images, and let all of the other nearly infinite number of image streams pass by unnoticed. These countless external images can in one sense be viewed as flowing in “by necessity,” since we have no control over all of the images that stream in at us, but in another way, Epicurus argues, which image we choose to focus on is dependent on us, that is, on our process of focusing, which ultimately depends, he says, on our beliefs. How? A brief example might help clarify this. When two people see a piece of cake on a table, they may have very different reactions to it. One person might next focus on mental images of getting the cake and eating it while shutting out all other images that stream in at him from outside, while the other person might focus on a different mental image, out of all that stream in at him, and shun eating it. The different reactions of the two people in such a situation, Epicurus holds, ultimately depend on their beliefs and the thoughts that stem from them, and how things seem to us depends on our “developments” that are, or are parts of, our characters. Since our “developments,” or how we develop, depends on us, then so too do what mental images we focus on as we think and deliberate depend on us.

*On Nature* Passage 4:<sup>34</sup>

... of which the emotions do not cease to become ... both admonishing and fighting and reforming one another as if having the cause also within themselves (ὥς ἔχοντας καὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς τὴν αἰτίαν) and not only in the original constitution and in the accidental necessity of that which surrounds and enters. For if someone should attribute to admonishing and being admonished the accidental necessity of what is present to himself then on each occasion ... [gap of a number of words] ... understand, blaming or praising, but if he should do this, he would be admitting the very thing which in regards to ourselves we think in accordance with the preconception of responsibility (κατὰ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας πρό[λ]ηψιν), changing the name ...

Here again, Epicurus is engaged in arguing with opponents who say everything we do happens by necessity, and is trying to show their view is self-defeating. He points out that his opponents admonish, fight with, and try to reform the views of others as if “they have the cause also within themselves,” and not in the “original constitution” (of their souls) and in the

“accidental necessity of that which surrounds and enters,” that is, in the images that stream in by necessity from outside. Such an opponent, Epicurus argues, merely changes the name, not the idea, of what we mean by “cause” or “responsibility.” Here Epicurus makes reference to his doctrine of *πρόληψις*, or preconception,<sup>35</sup> of “cause” or “responsibility.” Epicurus argues that his opponent, although he attributes the process of understanding, blaming, or praising to necessity, actually acts in a way that fits what we mean by the concept of “responsibility,” changing only the name but not the reality.

*On Nature* Passage 5:<sup>36</sup>

... of so great an error. For such an argument is turned upside down and is never able to establish that all things that we say are by necessity really are such, but he fights with someone about this very thing as if that person is foolish through his own agency (*δι' ἑαυτόν*). And even if he should keep saying forever that he does this in turn by necessity on each occasion on the basis of arguments, he does not reason well in attaching the responsibility of reasoning correctly to himself (*εἰς ἑαυτόν*), and of not reasoning correctly to his opponent. But unless he should stop (attaching responsibility) to himself (*[εἰς ἑαυτόν]*), but should assign it to necessity, he would not ...

Here again Epicurus describes his opponent who is arguing that everything happens by necessity as arguing in a self-contradictory way. When the opponent argues with others in order to try to change their minds, he is acting as if the one he is arguing against is responsible for his or her views. Even if Epicurus's opponent should deny this, and say that at each stage of the argument he is arguing by necessity, Epicurus maintains that his opponent is still really maintaining that he is responsible for arguing correctly, and the one he is arguing with is responsible for not arguing correctly. Epicurus imagines that his opponent could then argue that he is not responsible for how he argues, but that he argues necessarily, but even here Epicurus thinks this would count against the view of his opponent.

*On Nature* Passage 6:<sup>37</sup>

... but labeling that which is called “from ourselves” (*[φ' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν]*) with the name of necessity is only to change the name. But he needs to show that we use a preconception with faulty outlines when we call the cause “through ourselves” (*δι' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν*) and not ... [long lacuna] ... but it becomes empty even to apply the term “by necessity” to what you are saying. But unless someone will show this and is able to turn away some helping element (*συνεργόν*) and impulse (*ῥοπήμα*) of ours from those things we accomplish when we call the cause “through ourselves” (*δι' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν*), but applies the term “necessity”

(ἀνάγκην) to all the things that we are eager (προ]θυ]μούμεθα) to do in space (κατὰ χώραν)<sup>38</sup> and name the cause “through ourselves” (δι’ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν), he will only change the name, and he will not modify any action of ours, just as in some cases a person who comprehends the sorts of things that are necessary is accustomed to turn aside those who are eager (προθυμουμένους) to do something in spite of the compulsion. But thought will seek to discover what sort of thing it is necessary to consider that which is done somehow out of ourselves (τὸ ἐξ [ἡμ]ῶν αὐτῶν π]ως πραττόμενον) with an eagerness (τῇ προθυμ[ίαι) for acting. For he has nothing else to do but to say . . . [long break] . . . especially of the silliest. But if someone does not force the point or does not set out the thing he is refuting or introducing, only the word is changed, as I have been saying for a long time. Those who first wrote adequately about causes, and who not only far surpassed those who came before but also those who came after them many times over, even though they provided great relief in many things, failed to see that they made necessity and the accidental (τ[ῇ]ν ἀνάγκην καὶ ταὐτόματ[ο]ν) the cause of everything. The very account that teaches this fell apart and it escaped the notice of the [great] man that in his actions he was clashing with his opinions and unless a certain forgetfulness of his opinions affected his actions he would constantly be causing trouble for himself. But where his opinion prevailed, he was falling into dire straits, and where it did not prevail, he was filled with strife because of the opposition between his actions and his beliefs. Since these things are so, it is necessary also, concerning the point I had reached speaking from the beginning for the purpose of clarifying these things, to give an account . . .

In this final lengthy passage from Book 25 that we will examine, Epicurus returns to the notion of *πρόληψις*, or preconception, and maintains that it counts against his opponent that human beings have a preconception of a cause being “through ourselves,” and that his opponent must show why this preconception of “through ourselves” is not correct. It does no good, Epicurus argues, to simply replace the phrase “through ourselves” with the term “necessity,” because this fails to explain where our preconception of “through ourselves” comes from, or why it is incorrect. The exact nature of the argument that Epicurus makes about our preconception of “through ourselves,” and why any attempt on the part of his opponent to rename it “necessity,” is difficult to determine, both because of the uncertainty of the text and the difficulty of Epicurus’s discussion. The translation I have given above is based on the texts of Laursen and Masi, who disagree on how to interpret parts of it. I want to make a suggestion about the terms of Epicurus’s argument that, while conjectural, seems to fit the evidence.

In the first half of this passage, Epicurus challenges his opponent, who is trying to argue that everything we do is necessitated, to show where our preconception of “through ourselves” (δι’ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν) is in error. We normally distinguish, Epicurus implies, between actions that are necessary and those that are “through ourselves.” For his opponent to succeed, if the



text and my translation of it are correct, Epicurus says that his opponent must separate off (conceptions of) a “helping element” (συνεργόν) and “impulse” (ὄρμημα) from our description of actions that we call “through ourselves” and which “we are eager (προ]θ[υ]μούμεθα) to do in space (κατὰ χώραν).” If true, this passage suggests that part of our preconception of actions that we perform “through ourselves” is, according to Epicurus, that such actions involve a “helping element” and “impulse” (presumably within us), and are actions that we are eager to perform. Unless his opponent can show that there is no “helping element” or “impulse” involved, or that these elements are not central to the concept of “through ourselves,” all he will do is change the name, not “modify any action of ours,” i.e., change the nature of our actions.

Epicurus then compares what his opponent is trying to do with someone who, knowing that some people are eager to do something but cannot because of some necessity that prevents them (and which they presumably are not aware of), is accustomed to turn them aside from what they are eager to do in spite of the compulsion. But such a comparison still leaves his opponent with a problem: if everything we do is done out of necessity, how are we to explain “that which is done somehow out of ourselves with an eagerness for acting” (τὸ ἐξ [ῆμ]ῶν αὐτῶ[ν π]ῶς πραττόμενον τῇ προθυμ[ίαι τοῦ πράτ]τειν)?

Although much of this discussion must remain conjectural because of the poor condition of the text, it is possible to see Epicurus arguing here that no matter how much his opponent tries to redefine actions that are “through ourselves” as in reality “necessary,” his opponent still will not be able to account for our preconception of acting “through ourselves,” a preconception which Epicurus argues involves the notions of a “helping element,” “impulse,” or an “eagerness for acting.”<sup>39</sup> Such terminology, as we will see when we look at Lucretius’s discussion of the swerve, is suggestive. Although Epicurus nowhere mentions the swerve in *On Nature* Book 25, it could be argued that he is heading in the direction of the swerve in this section with his discussion of the preconception of “through ourselves” and the connected notions of “helping element,” “impulse,” and “eagerness for acting.”

In the second half of this passage, Epicurus turns to describe the great achievements of his predecessors (the early atomists) who “first wrote



adequately about causes.” As great as they were, they failed to see that their teaching made “necessity and the accidental” (τ[ῆ]ν ἀνάγκην καὶ ταῦτόματ[ο]ν) the cause of everything. This being so, even the great man (i.e., Democritus himself)<sup>40</sup> failed to see that his opinions clashed with his actions. Presumably, while he taught that everything happened by necessity, he acted as if he was not constrained in all that he did. Epicurus, with his teaching that not all things happen through necessity, and leaving room for notions like things “depending on us” and happening “through us,” has shown that we can be considered responsible for the way our characters develop and for actions that are performed “through us.”

Having surveyed some of the major sections of *On Nature* Book 25, we are now in a position to take stock of how they help us reconstruct Epicurus’s analysis of moral responsibility. As we have seen, Epicurus’s main concern in the book is to defend his views on moral responsibility and human psychological development against objections that our characters, thoughts, and actions are all necessitated from birth. He does this by distinguishing the individual atoms that we are born with from the mind and soul complex composed by them. Epicurus claims that our minds, as they develop, begin to be the cause of themselves, and to be responsible for how we develop. As we grow up and acquire reason, we become responsible for what our characters are, and how we react to external stimulus. Because of the poor state of preservation of the text, many of the details of how this happens must be supplied, but it looks like Epicurus imagines that the mind, through the use of reason and the education we receive, becomes responsible for what kind of person we become. As noted earlier, this view is consistent with the account of character development and reformation that Lucretius presents at 3.288–322, where he argues that even if we have a preponderance of one type or another of mind atom, and have a tendency to be prone to anger, or to passivity, or to other character types, we have the ability to modify our characters through philosophical training to achieve a happy life. Precisely how this happens is not spelled out in Book 25 or in the Lucretius passage, but it must involve changing the way our minds react in certain situations. A likely mechanism is through changing the way our mind focuses on images as we think. As mentioned earlier, Epicurus taught that our mind thinks by focusing on external images. This focusing ability of the mind, named ἐπιβολὴ τῆς διανοίας, is the power of the mind that allows it to focus on new thoughts as we think. In order to change our

characters, the mind must somehow learn to focus on some images and exclude others. For example, if a person is too prone to anger, she may have to learn how, after receiving a perceived slight, to focus not on images of a kind that lead to a feeling of anger, but on other images that lead to different sorts of feelings.

Surveying the fragments of Book 25, I agree with Francesca Masi that in these passages Epicurus is discussing mental states and is trying to maintain that at some point in our psychological development, through education and our reason, we are able to have some control over how we develop morally, and become morally responsible.<sup>41</sup> I also agree with Masi that it looks like when Epicurus composed Book 25 of *On Nature* he had not yet developed the swerve, but that he was working on issues that would ultimately lead him to do so. Masi's view is that Epicurus's worries about how and the extent to which we have control over and are responsible for our character development was the aspect of the discussion in Book 25 that may have led him to develop the swerve. This is possible, but it may also be another aspect of the discussion in Book 25 that played a greater role in Epicurus's development of the swerve. As we saw in Passage 6 above, Epicurus emphasized that humans think that in actions that we perform "through ourselves," and that we are eager to perform, there is a "helping element" (*συνεργόν*) and an "impulse" (*ὄρμημα*). It is possible that Epicurus, pushed to explain what this "helping element" or "impulse" might be at the atomic level, came up with an explanation that involved the swerve of atoms.

## THE SWERVE AND FREEDOM OF ACTION IN LUCRETIUS 2.216–93

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The main source of our knowledge of Epicurus's doctrine of the swerve and the role it plays in Epicurus's physics and psychology is the Roman poet and Epicurean, Lucretius. Lucretius introduces the swerve in *De rerum natura* Book 2, as part of his discussion of atomic motion. After treating the motions of atoms caused by collision and by weight, Lucretius discusses a third motion of the atoms, the swerve. His discussion falls into two main parts: the first (2.216–50) discusses the role the swerve plays in Epicurean

physics, and the second (2.251–93) the role it plays in Epicurean psychology.

As we begin to examine the two sections of Lucretius's treatment, it is important to see what Lucretius's purpose is in discussing the swerve at this point in his account. Lucretius is here not primarily concerned with giving a detailed account of the precise role that the swerve plays in Epicurean physics and psychology. Rather, his main purpose is to prove, simply and conclusively, that the swerve exists.<sup>42</sup> Since the swerve, as he tells us, is a random and unpredictable motion of the atom a minimal amount of space, it is something that one might easily doubt exists. To prove its existence, Lucretius argues in good Epicurean fashion that we can see evidence of the swerve's existence by looking at the world around us. He argues that the swerve must exist, because if it did not, (1) no compound bodies would exist (lines 216–50), and (2) we would not be able to explain the ability of living creatures to initiate their own actions (lines 252–93). Exactly how he does this will become clear as we examine the two sections of his account.

Lucretius's first proof of the swerve's existence is based on Epicurean physics (2.216–50):<sup>43</sup>

In this matter there is this, too, that I want you to understand,  
that when the first bodies are moving straight downward through the void  
by their own weight, at times completely undetermined  
and in undetermined places they swerve a little from their course,  
but only so much as you could call a change of motion. 220  
Because unless they were accustomed to swerving, all would fall  
downwards like drops of rain through the deep void,  
nor would a collision occur, nor would a blow be produced  
by the first beginnings. Thus nature would never have created anything.  
But if by chance anyone believes that heavier bodies, 225  
because they are carried along more quickly straight through the void,  
fall upon lighter ones from above and so produce  
the blows which are able to supply generating motions,  
he goes astray, far from true reasoning.  
For whatever things fall through water and insubstantial air 230  
must hasten their falls in proportion to their weight,  
since the body of water and the thin nature of air  
are not at all able to delay each thing equally,  
but yield more quickly when they are overcome by heavier things.  
But on the other hand neither on any side nor at any 235  
time can empty void hold up anything,  
but must, as its nature requires, hasten to give way.

Therefore all must be borne on through the peaceful void  
 moved at equal rates, though not of equal weights.  
 Thus heavier bodies will never be able to fall on lighter 240  
 ones from above nor on their own to cause collisions which produce  
 the various motions through which nature accomplishes things.  
 Wherefore again and again it is necessary that bodies  
 swerve a little, but no more than a minimum, lest we seem  
 to be inventing oblique motions, and the true facts refute it. 245  
 For we see that this is clear and manifest, that weights,  
 insofar as in them lies, cannot travel obliquely,  
 when they fall from above, as far as you can perceive.  
 But that it does not make itself swerve at all  
 from the straight direction of its path, who is there who can perceive?

As scholars have noted, Lucretius's account in this section is an example of a form of argument favored by the Epicureans, *σημείωσις ἀπὸ τῶν φαινομένων* ("inference from the phenomena"), a form of the "*modus tollendo tollens*," or "Denying the Consequent" argument.<sup>44</sup> In lines 216–50, the basic structure of the argument is:<sup>45</sup>

Proposition to be proved (ll. 216–20): The swerve of atoms exists.

Step 1 (221–24): If the swerve did not exist, atoms would not collide and form compound bodies.

Addendum to step 1 (225–42): Refutation of the belief that atoms could collide in some other way without the swerve.

Step 2 (implied): But compound bodies exist.

Step 3 (243–44): Therefore the swerve exists.

Addendum to entire argument (245–50): The swerve must be a minimum, and no more, because if were larger than a minimum, we would see its effects around us when compound bodies fall downwards.

There is much that could be said about this first section on the swerve. Democritus apparently posited only one type of atomic motion, that caused by collision, and scholars have debated why and how Epicurus developed his theory of three types of atomic motions: downward fall caused by weight, motion in all directions caused by collisions, and the minimal swerve of atoms.<sup>46</sup> The most important point to notice for our purposes, however, is that the main thrust of this section is to prove that the swerve

exists. As we will see, this is identical to the main thrust of the second section (2.251–93) on the swerve that immediately follows:

And next if every motion is always linked,  
and a new one always arises from an old one in sure succession,  
and if by declining the primary bodies do not make  
a certain beginning of motion to burst the laws of fate,  
so that cause does not follow cause from infinity, 255  
from where does there arise for living creatures throughout the world,  
from where, I say, is this free will, torn from fate,  
by which we go wherever pleasure leads each of us,  
and likewise decline our motions at no fixed time  
or fixed region of space, but where the mind itself carries us? 260  
For doubtless one's own will provides for each a beginning  
of these things, and from it motions stream through the limbs.  
For don't you also see that while the starting gates drop in an instant,  
the desirous force of the horses is nevertheless not able  
to burst forth as suddenly as the mind itself desires? 265  
For the entire store of matter throughout the whole body has  
to be stimulated to motion, so that once it is stimulated and has exerted itself  
throughout every limb it can follow the mind's eagerness.  
So you can see that a beginning of motion is created in the heart,  
and comes forth first from the will of the mind, 270  
and then is conveyed through the whole body and limbs.  
Nor is it similar to when we are struck by a blow and travel forward  
by the great strength and great constraint of another.  
For then it is clear that the whole matter of our entire  
body moves and is seized against our will, 275  
until the will reins it in throughout the limbs.  
Now you see, don't you, that although an external force pushes many,  
and often forces them to move forward and to be thrown headlong  
against their will, there is nevertheless something in our breast  
which is able to offer resistance and fight back? 280  
And at its bidding too the store of matter  
is sometimes forced to change direction through the limbs and joints,  
and although it is pushed forward, it is checked and again comes to rest.  
Wherefore it is also necessary to admit that there is likewise in the atoms  
another cause of motions besides collisions and weight, 285  
from which comes this innate power in us,  
since we see that nothing can come into being from nothing.  
For weight prevents everything from happening by blows  
as if by external force. But so that the mind itself  
has no internal necessity in performing all its actions, 290  
and is not forced as if conquered to bear and suffer,  
the tiny swerve of the atoms at no fixed region

of space nor fixed time brings it about.

This is a difficult but crucial passage. Many scholars have analyzed it over the past five decades, and no agreement has been reached about how to interpret it.<sup>47</sup>

As was the case with the first section on the swerve (2.216–50), this second section is an argument in the form of a *modus tollendo tollens*. Its basic intent is to show that the swerve of atoms exists by pointing out phenomena that cannot otherwise be explained, and the overall argument has been well captured by Don Fowler:

If there is no *clinamen*, there is no *voluntas*; but we can see that there is a *voluntas*; therefore the *clinamen* exists.<sup>48</sup>

How does Lucretius make this case, and what does the way he makes the case tell us about what role the swerve plays in Epicurean psychology and in Epicurus's analysis of voluntary action and moral responsibility? To find out, we must examine the passage in more detail. The section thus falls into three main sections: (1) 251–62, which introduces the section; (2) 263–83, which presents examples of voluntary and forced actions; and (3) 284–93, which summarizes and concludes the argument.<sup>49</sup> Set out in the form of the *modus tollendo tollens*, the argument can be outlined as follows:

Proposition to be proved (carried over from lines 216–20): The swerve of atoms exists.

Step 1 (251–62): If the swerve of atoms did not exist, living creatures would not possess *libera voluntas*.

Step 2 (263–83): But living creatures do have *libera voluntas*.

A. (263–71): Example of voluntary action: horses moving from the starting gate.

B. (272–83): Example of forced action (person who is shoved), with voluntary action initiated to counteract it.

Step 3 (284–93): Therefore the swerve exists in the atoms.

(1) 251–62: Although Lucretius expresses his thought in a somewhat complicated way in this section, the main line of his argument is clear. If

atoms do not swerve, Lucretius asks, what is the source of *libera voluntas* that living creatures possess, by which they move wherever and whenever their minds lead them? The section is composed of two sentences. It opens with an elaborate conditional that is composed of a protasis (“And next if . . . from infinity”) in 251–55, and apodosis (“from where . . . carries us?”) in 256–60. More simply put, this section of the text argues, “If the atoms do not swerve, what is the source of *libera voluntas* that animals<sup>50</sup> possess, by which they move when and where they wish?” The main point of the sentence is to connect the swerve of atoms with the actions of living creatures.

As I interpret this section, Lucretius analyzes *voluntas* as the faculty of the mind that is responsible for the power which living creatures possess to initiate movement, and presents the swerve as the means by which the *voluntas* begins the motions it wants to perform. The swerve, in other words, is the source of motion within us, and is involved in every voluntary action. The text shows this in several ways. First, in lines 253–54, Lucretius says that atoms by declining provide a *motus principium quoddam* (“a certain beginning of motion”), and in 261–62 that the *voluntas* provides a beginning of acting (*his rebus . . . principium*), thus identifying the swerve with the action of the *voluntas*. Second, Lucretius carefully links the swerve with our actions by applying terminology which implies a close connection with the swerve, when in lines 259–60 he says that it is through the *voluntas* that we “likewise swerve our motions” (*declinamus item motus*) at no fixed time or place. And third, Lucretius’s entire argument gains in strength if we realize he is identifying the swerve as the source of motion in living creatures. What in effect he argues, in the form of a *modus tollendo tollens* argument, as we mentioned earlier, is that if the swerve does not exist, we cannot explain why living creatures have the power to move when they want, i.e., why they seem to have the source of their motions within them.<sup>51</sup>

(2) 263–83: In this section, Lucretius analyzes two examples of the actions of living creatures, one a voluntary action of horses leaping forth at a starting gate, and one a forced action of a human who is pushed but then recovers. Scholars have analyzed these examples in a wide variety of ways, in line with their views of the role swerve plays in Epicurean psychology, and I will have more to say about their views below. For now, I argue that the two examples are taken most naturally, in line with the opening of the passage, as illustrations of the swerve as the source of motion in living



creatures, in line with Lucretius's main goal in the passage of pointing to features of the visible world that cannot be explained without the supposition that the swerve of atoms exists.

In both examples Lucretius is careful to point out that the motion involved must have a beginning within the living creature. The horse's body has to be stimulated to action from within, and Lucretius points to a beginning of motion (*initum motus*, 269) in the "heart and *voluntas* of the mind" which then transfers the motion throughout the body. Likewise, the ability we have of recovering from enforced motion illustrates not only that there is a difference between forced and self-initiated motions, but indicates what the difference is. There is something in our breast (*in pectore nostro quiddam*, 279–80) which can fight back against enforced motion. Lucretius, I think, leaves no doubt that this "beginning of motion" (*initus motus*) is the same as the "certain beginning of motion" (*motus principium quoddam*) of 253–54, the swerve. The living creatures in the two examples initiate actions by the power they possess, called *voluntas*, which in turn is a faculty of the soul that initiates motion by means of the swerve, which is defined as a beginning of motion. Lucretius, attempting in 2.216–93 to prove the existence of the swerve, introduces in these lines examples of actions that he thinks cannot be explained without the supposition of the swerve, which is responsible for them.

That Lucretius is here pointing to events in the physical world that we can see (the horse leaping from the starting gate, and the person who is shoved and recovers) as the clear result of the motion of atoms at the atomic level (in this case, of the swerve) is further strengthened by an earlier passage in Book 2 (112–41), where Lucretius notes that the motions of motes in a sunbeam provide not only an example of what atomic motion is like, but actually illustrate the visible effects of motions at the atomic level. The back and forth motions of the motes we can see in a sunbeam must ultimately be caused by the motions of atoms which strike larger atomic complexes which in their turn move even larger atomic complexes, until they move the motes we can see moving in the sunbeams. As Lucretius writes (2.138–41):

So motion arises from the first beginnings and gradually reaches  
the level of our senses, so that those things are moved  
also which we are able to see in the light of the sun,  
yet by what blows they do this is not readily apparent.

As several scholars have pointed out,<sup>52</sup> Lucretius seems to be describing a similar process in the examples of the horse leaping forth from the starting gate and the person recovering after being shoved. In the examples of the horse and the person, the actions we see are the results of swerves of atoms that start a series of atomic motions that eventually culminate in the motions of the whole living creatures.

(3) 284–93: In the final section, Lucretius concludes his argument by reminding the reader that the swerve must be posited as a third type of motion to allow us to explain where the innate power (*innata potestas*: 286) of acting voluntarily comes from. Lucretius, after presenting examples of the actions of living creatures which he says demonstrate that there is something within us which enables us to initiate action and fight back against external force, returns with the “wherefore” (*quare*) of 284 to the atoms and asserts that there must be a type of motion, different from collisions and the downward fall caused by weight, which accounts for this power in us, since, according to the Epicurean maxim, nothing can come into being from nothing. In other words, if we cannot explain the movements of living creatures in terms of the collisions and weights of their component atoms, there must be a third type of motion in terms of which they can be explained. The “tiny swerve of atoms” (*exiguum clinamen principiorum*) makes sure that the “mind itself” (*mens*<sup>53</sup> *ipsa*) does not have internal necessity in doing everything and is not forced, as if conquered, to bear and suffer. In line with what he has already said in the passage from 251 onwards, I take it that when Lucretius says the swerve prevents the mind from having internal necessity, he means that it is the basis of the mind’s ability to be active and makes it so that its motions are not subject to necessity. Without the swerve, the mind, and thus all living creatures, would act “as if conquered” and be forced to bear and suffer whatever came to them. If this were the case, we would not see, as we do, living creatures actively initiate their own motions.

On the basis of this interpretation of lines 251–93, it is clear that when Lucretius says that the swerve is the source of *libera voluntas* in living creatures, he means that the swerve is the source of the ability that living creatures have of initiating their own actions, in other words, that it is the ultimate source of their motions, and he emphasizes this aspect throughout the passage, both explicitly and with the two examples of the race horses and the falling man who recovers his balance. Again, the basic structure of

the argument is: If the swerve of atoms did not exist, living creatures would not be able to initiate their own motions. But they do. Therefore, the swerve of atoms must exist.

But if the swerve is involved as a source of motion in every voluntary action of all living creatures, what is the precise role that it plays? This is a more difficult question, and given the nature of our sources, impossible to settle with certainty.<sup>54</sup> Various theories have been proposed,<sup>55</sup> but if I am correct that the main point of Lucretius 2.216–93 is primarily to prove the *existence* of the swerve with two *modus tolendo tollens* arguments, one based on the existence of compound bodies (216–50), and one based on the voluntary motions of living creatures (251–93), we should not be surprised if in this passage Lucretius does not provide enough information for us to determine precisely the swerve’s role at the atomic level in Epicurean psychology, theory of action, and ethics.

## MODERN VIEWS ON THE SWERVE

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As noted earlier, modern interpretations of the role the swerve plays in Epicurean psychology and ethical theory are numerous and vary greatly. Also as noted earlier, the major division among scholars is between those who believe the swerve somehow plays a role in individual voluntary actions, and those who believe it does not, but was meant to play some other role in Epicurus’s efforts to argue against determinism and defend the possibility of human beings’ being responsible for their actions and being able to obtain happiness.

A common assumption of scholars who have written on the swerve is that the swerve must have played one, and only one, role in Epicurean psychology. If true, given the nature of our sources, it is unlikely we will ever be able to figure out what that exact role is. Scholars have come up with many different theories, and all of them have stronger points and weaker points. Rather than end this discussion with an endorsement of one particular theory of the swerve, however, I want to propose a new paradigm for looking at the swerve. Whatever Epicurus’s original reasons for proposing the swerve of atoms, once he posited it, it was available to him to exploit fully in his psychological and ethical system. Exactly how he did

this may be difficult to see in our sources, but the various conjectures of scholars made over the past fifty years give us an idea of the range of options available to him.

First, as those scholars who have argued that the swerve plays a role in every voluntary action argue, it is reasonable to interpret Lucretius 2.251–93 as showing that the swerve is the physical basis of volition, or striving. Every time a living creature starts to act on a desire and moves to accomplish something, a swerve is involved.<sup>56</sup> It is also reasonable to argue, as Don Fowler<sup>57</sup> has argued, that the mind’s ability to focus on one image as opposed to others involves the mind’s self-motion, and that this also involves a swerve of mind atoms. Similarly, all of the mind’s activities that involve the mind moving itself, including sensation, thinking, and remembering, can be argued, on the basis of passages in Lucretius Book 3 (143–46, 182–85, 237–40, 269–72), to involve some self-moving principle in the soul like the swerve.<sup>58</sup> Lucretius and Cicero also provide evidence that the swerve was meant to prevent the motions of the atoms that make up the mind from being subject to necessity: Lucretius notes (2.289–93) that without the swerve the mind would have internal necessity “in performing all of its functions” (*cunctis in rebus agendis*), and Cicero makes a similar argument in *Fat.* 23.<sup>59</sup>

Once Epicurus had established the swerve as part of his account of voluntary action, and of the freedom of the mind’s activities in general, he was free to exploit it more broadly. One problem with Lucretius’s account of the swerve is that although it makes it clear that the swerve is involved in the voluntary actions of all living creatures, he leaves it an open question about what role, if any, the swerve played in helping to explain why human beings, as opposed to animals, are able to develop morally, are held responsible for their good and bad actions, and are liable to praise and blame.

This is where the views of a second group of scholars, including Furley, Bobzien, and Masi, are important.<sup>60</sup> Although their views differ in some particulars, all three maintain that the swerve is not involved in the individual voluntary actions of humans or other animals, but was posited by Epicurus to play a role in the development of human character. The swerve insures that not all of the movements of our mind atoms are determined and thus that our character development is somehow “up to us,” and that we are

thus responsible for our actions, subject to praise and blame, and able to attain happiness by studying Epicureanism and putting its tenets into practice.<sup>61</sup>

A third group of scholars, including Conway, Pope, Mitsis, Wendlandt and Baltzly, O’Keefe, and Németh,<sup>62</sup> locate the swerve’s effect neither in the individual actions of living creatures, nor in the formation of our characters so that that our characters are “up to us.” They argue instead, each in different ways, that the very existence of the swerve insures that there are no infinite and unbreakable chains of causation at the atomic level, and thus that worries that everything in the universe, including human volitions and actions, is determined are unfounded. They thus argue that Epicurus left room for human freedom of action and moral responsibility, but that he based this position on the fundamental indeterminism of the motion of atoms at the atomic level without needing to be more specific than that.

Given what I have argued about Lucretius 2.216–93, I think that the latter two groups of scholars are mistaken in their belief that the swerve does not play a role in every voluntary action of living creatures, but that some important aspects of their views on the swerve are correct. As we saw above, in *On Nature* Book 25 Epicurus argues against determinism, and there is no reason to suppose that once Epicurus came up with the swerve he would not use it as broadly and as effectively as he could to argue that we humans at a certain point in our development are responsible for our characters and actions, and that it depends on us how we turn out and whether we are able to lead a happy life or not. Indeed, this broader view of the swerve finds support in a section of the Lucretius passage from Book 2 we discussed above, when in lines 251–55, Lucretius notes that if the swerve did not exist, every motion would be always linked, a new one would always arise from an old one in sure succession, the laws of fate could never be broken, and cause would follow cause from infinity. These lines make clear that Lucretius believes that if the swerve exists, no determinist theory like the one Epicurus argues against in *On Nature* Book 25 can be right. Our actions, the motions of our minds, our characters, and all the atomic motions on which they are based are not and cannot be subject to necessity and determinism.

In sum, it may be that the swerve, once Epicurus developed it, made an appearance in a number of places in Epicurus’s atomic system. In the works

of Epicurus that have survived, including the *Letter to Menoeceus* and *On Nature* Book 25, we see Epicurus clearly worried about causal determinism and arguing against it, but without explicitly invoking the swerve. At some point, though, as Lucretius 2.216–93 clearly shows, Epicurus developed the swerve and pointed to the existence of compound bodies (2.216–50) and the self-initiated voluntary actions of living creatures (2.251–93) as proof that the swerve exists. Once posited, Epicurus could invoke it whenever there was a need to explain, at the atomic level, why a whole range of phenomena was possible: the existence of compound bodies, the voluntary motions of all living creatures, the ability of the mind to be active and self-moving in its activities (including sensation, focusing on images, remembering, and thinking), the concept of “what is up to us,” or moral responsibility, why our character development, and thus our characters, are up to us, and why the principle of bivalence must be false, since the swerve insures that not everything is determined by pre-existing causes.

## CONCLUSION

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In *Letter to Herodotus* 80, Epicurus writes:

And so if we think that something might happen also in a particular way, we will be as undisturbed knowing that it happens in a number of different ways as if we knew it happens in a particular way.

As this passage illustrates, Epicurus famously advised his followers that there are some cases where, given our remove from a particular phenomenon, we are not able to determine with certainty which of a number of possible explanations is or are correct. Rather than argue that one particular explanation is correct, and all the others incorrect, Epicurus urges us, in order to escape mental disturbance, to accept all of the possible explanations that are not contradicted by the phenomena.

Given the problems with our ancient sources on the swerve, and the many excellent modern studies that have reached such different conclusions about the swerve and its role in voluntary action and moral responsibility, it may be best to follow Epicurus’s advice and not be dogmatic about any particular solution. I have tried to suggest in this chapter, though, that the

most likely view is that Epicurus, trying to find an answer to the question of how human beings, if our minds are made up of atoms, and atoms necessarily are moved due to their own weight or collisions with other atoms, can develop morally and change our beliefs, thoughts, and actions to attain happiness, and be responsible for our actions, came up with the doctrine of the swerve. Trying to find evidence to support the view that the swerve exists, he found examples like those in Lucretius of the horse taking off from the starting gate and the person who is pushed and initiates his own recovery, to be good evidence. Once the existence of the swerve in the mind of living creatures was established, it could then be exploited further: the mind, thanks to the swerve, initiates many of its own motions. Among these motions are the ability to sense, think, determine our own actions, and even change our characters. The swerve allows all living creatures to act voluntarily, humans to be morally responsible for their actions and characters and direct their lives towards happiness, and the universe to exist without being fully determined at the atomic level.

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<sup>1</sup> English translations in the chapter are my own, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> For Aristotle's views on voluntary action and moral responsibility, see especially *EN* 3.1–5. Scholars differ greatly on the extent to which they think Epicurus had access to the works of Aristotle and was affected by them.

<sup>3</sup> Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action*, 9–11.

<sup>4</sup> Cic. *Fat.* 18, 22–3, 46–8, *ND* 1.69, *Fin.* 1.19, 1.28; Phld. *Sign.* 36.11–17; Diog. Oen. Smith fr. 54; Gal. *De Plac.* 4.4; Plu. *Mor.* 964C, 1015C, 1045B–C, 1050B–C; Plotinus, *Enn.* 3.1.15–20; August. *C. acad.* 3.23.

<sup>5</sup> For discussions of the different ways modern scholars interpret the swerve, see O'Keefe, *Epicurus on Freedom*; and Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente* 218–55.

<sup>6</sup> Gigandet, "Les principes de la physique," 71 notes that Lucretius leaves the role the swerve plays in voluntary action so obscure that scholars are reduced to conjectures and reconstructions.

<sup>7</sup> O'Keefe, *Epicurus on Freedom*, 65–109.

<sup>8</sup> Proponents of the anti-reductionist view are Mitsis, "Epicurus' Ethical Theory" and *Epicurus' Ethical Theory. The Pleasures of Invulnerability* 129–166; Sedley, "Epicurus' Refutation of Determinism" and "Epicurean Anti-reductionism"; and Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.102–12. On the other hand, Purinton, "Epicurus on 'Free Volition' and the Atomic Swerve," Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 428–43, and O'Keefe, *Epicurus on Freedom*, 65–109

argue for reductionist positions. Sharples, “Epicurus, Carneades, and the Atomic Swerve,” 175 n. 4 contains a clear discussion of the distinction between eliminativism and reductionism. Németh, *Epicurus on the Self*, 70–107 opposes both reductionist and anti-reductionist positions, arguing instead for a “non-reductive physicalist interpretation” (72).

<sup>9</sup> Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*, 186.

<sup>10</sup> Purinton, “Epicurus on ‘Free Volition’ and the Atomic Swerve,” 295.

<sup>11</sup> Asmis, *The Epicurean Theory of Free Will*, 11–3; *Epicurus’ Scientific Method*, 280; and “Free Action and the Swerve,” 278.

<sup>12</sup> Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action*, 11; Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 218–27.

<sup>13</sup> See the *apparatus criticus* to fragment 20 A in Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2.104.

<sup>14</sup> For discussions of the meaning of the phrase “depends on us” (*παρ’ ἡμᾶς*), see Annas, “Epicurus on Agency,” 55–6 and O’Keefe, *Epicurus on Freedom*, 82 n. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Laursen, “Epicurus On Nature XXV.”

<sup>16</sup> The three exemplars are contained in six Herculaneum papyri fragments: the first consists of *P.Herc.* 1191; the second of *P.Herc.* 1420, 1056; the third *P.Herc.* 419, 1634, 697. For more detailed information on the papyri of Book 25, see Laursen, “The Early Parts of Epicurus,” 1–38; and Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 13–19.

<sup>17</sup> Important studies include Sedley, “Epicurus’ Refutation of Determinism” and “Epicurean Anti-reductionism”; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.102–11; 2.104–13; Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory*, 148–66; Laursen, “Epicurus On Nature XXV,” “Epicurus On Nature XXV (Long-Sedley 20, B, C and j),” “The Early Parts of Epicurus,” and “The Later Parts of Epicurus”; Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of the Mind*, 123–37 and “Epicurus on Agency”; Purinton, “Epicurus on the Degrees of Responsibility,” and “Epicurus on ‘Free Volition’ and the Atomic Swerve”; Bobzien, “Did Epicurus Discover the Free Will Problem?”; Hammerstaedt, “Atomismo e libertà nel XXV libro *περὶ φύσεως* di Epicuro”; O’Keefe, “The Reductionist and Compatibilist Argument” and *Epicurus on Freedom*, 65–109; Masi, “La nozione Epicurea di *απογεγεννημένα*,” “L’antideterminismo di Epicuro e il suo limite,” *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, “Libertà senza *clinamen*,” and “Memory, Self and Self-Determination”; Németh, *Epicurus on the Self*.

<sup>18</sup> Laursen, “The Early Parts of Epicurus,” and “The Later Parts of Epicurus”; Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*; Németh, *Epicurus on the Self*.

<sup>19</sup> My discussion of Book 25 is much indebted to the work of Laursen and Masi, and to the work of scholars who preceded them. Németh, *Epicurus on the Self*, is an important more recent treatment.

<sup>20</sup> For this view about who Epicurus’s philosophical opponents are in Book 25, see Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 106–57.

<sup>21</sup> For the terms and their translations that follow, see Laursen, “The Later Parts of Epicurus,” 10. On some points, and especially for the important term “developments” (*τὰ ἀπογεγεννημένα*) and its cognates I follow Masi’s interpretation and analysis in “La nozione Epicurea di *απογεγεννημένα*,” *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, and “Libertà senza *clinamen*.”

<sup>22</sup> In the outline of Epicurus’s view of human development in the next paragraph, I am following the account in Masi, “La nozione Epicurea di *απογεγεννημένα*,” 40 and “L’antideterminismo di Epicuro e il suo limite,” 171. Indeed, as Francesca Masi plausibly argues, it appears that in Book 25 Epicurus uses three different forms of *ἀπογεννάω* (“to produce”) to refer to three different developmental stages: the aorist participle (*ἀπογεννηθέν*: “the original product”), the present participle (*ἀπογεννώμενον*: “the developing product”), and the perfect participle

(ἀπογεγεννημένον: “the developed product”). For a different account of ἀπογεγεννημένον and related terms, see Németh, *Epicurus on the Self*, 86-98.

<sup>23</sup> In this translation, I follow Masi’s phrase “prodotto in via di sviluppo,” from “La nozione Epicurea di ἀπογεγεννημένα,” 40.

<sup>24</sup> The translations that follow are my own, but have been informed by those of Sedley, “Epicurus’ Refutation of Determinism”; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*; Laursen, “The Later Parts of Epicurus”; Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*; and Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*. For the most part I follow the Greek text found in Laursen, “The Later Parts of Epicurus”; and Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, but in several places I instead translate the Greek text found in Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*.

<sup>25</sup> Laursen, “The Later Parts of Epicurus,” 19–20 = Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 20B (1–4) = Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 82–3, T7 (a, b).

<sup>26</sup> For the reading (τ[ὰ] ἀπ[ο]γεν[νηθῆ]ντα) I here follow Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 82, T7 (a).

<sup>27</sup> In the discussion that follows, I use the English term “mind” for the mind/soul complex of atoms that Epicurus argued was located in the chest, and was responsible for sensation, thinking, memory, and other mental functions. Our fullest account of Epicurus’s views on the mind/soul (*animus/animus*) complex is found in Lucretius Book 3.

<sup>28</sup> The status of living creatures besides human beings in Book 25 is controversial. See Huby, “The Epicureans, Animals, and Free Will”; and Verlinsky, “Do Animals Have Freewill?”

<sup>29</sup> Laursen, “The Later Parts of Epicurus,” 22–3 = Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 20B (5–7) = Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 83, T7 (c).

<sup>30</sup> Sedley, “Epicurus’ Refutation of Determinism” and “Epicurean Anti-reductionism”; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.107–12; Hammerstaedt, “Atomismo e libertà nel XXV libro περὶ φύσεως di Epicuro,” 157–58 suggests that the reference to “some difference (ἐτερότητα) of (or from) the atoms” is a reference to the swerve, though I think there is not enough evidence to tell, and the passage can be interpreted without such an assumption.

<sup>31</sup> Laursen, “The Later Parts of Epicurus,” 32–4 = Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 20C (1) = Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 94, T8 (a).

<sup>32</sup> Our fullest ancient account of the atomic images that account for perception and the even finer atomic images that account for thought is found in Lucretius 4.1–822.

<sup>33</sup> On Epicurus’s concept of ἐπιβολὴ τῆς διανοίας, see Lucretius 4.794–815 and the helpful discussion in Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of the Mind*, 165–66.

<sup>34</sup> Laursen, “The Later Parts of Epicurus,” 35 = Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 20C (2–4) = Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 95, T8 (c).

<sup>35</sup> For the Epicurean doctrine of “preconception” or “general concept” (πρόληψις) see Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction*, 26–30; Asmis, *Epicurus’ Scientific Method*, 19–80; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.87–90.

<sup>36</sup> Laursen, “The Later Parts of Epicurus,” 37 = Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 20C (5–7) = Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 95, T8 (d).

<sup>37</sup> Laursen, “The Later Parts of Epicurus,” 37–42 = Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 20C (8–15) = Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 95–6, T8 (e, f, g).

<sup>38</sup> The exact role of the phrase κατὰ χώραν (“in space”) in the sentence is unclear. I follow Laursen, “The Later Parts of Epicurus,” 54 in construing it with “to do” (πράττειν) rather than with “necessity” (ἀνάγκην) as Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 98 does.

<sup>39</sup> For a clear and insightful analysis of this section of Book 25, see Bobzien, “Did Epicurus Discover the Free Will Problem?,” 302–305. I agree with Bobzien that in this passage we see that

“Thus Epicurus seems to envisage necessity as some kind of compulsion, and to presuppose that if our actions are necessitated, they will happen even if we do not desire to bring them about; by contrast, if we are the causes of our actions, our desiring to act will be causally connected with the action itself.”

<sup>40</sup> Epicureans often referred to Democritus as “the great man.” See Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2.108.

<sup>41</sup> Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 256–62.

<sup>42</sup> This point is well made by Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 324; and Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 231, 237.

<sup>43</sup> All translations from Lucretius are from Englert, *Lucretius, On the Nature of Things*.

<sup>44</sup> Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 191, 301, 309; O’Keefe, *Epicurus on Freedom*, 112; Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 231, 237.

<sup>45</sup> For a clear and more detailed outline of the argument, see Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 309.

<sup>46</sup> On this question, see Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action*, 27–62; O’Keefe, “Does Epicurus Need the Swerve” and *Epicurus on Freedom*, 110–22; Purinton, “Epicurus on ‘Free Volition’ and the Atomic Swerve,” 259–64; Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 305–309.

<sup>47</sup> Important discussions include: Giussani, *Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*, 125–67, 186–95; Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*, 2.837–52; Furley, *Two Studies in the Greek Atomists*; Asmis, *The Epicurean Theory of Free Will* and “Free Action and the Swerve”; Sedley, “Epicurus’ Refutation of Determinism” and “Epicurean Anti-reductionism”; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.102–12; Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action*; Gulley, “Lucretius on Free Will”; Sharples, “Epicurus, Carneades, and the Atomic Swerve” and *Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics*, 42–3, 64–6; Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of the Mind* and “Epicurus on Agency”; Cucchiarelli, “Lucrezio, *de rer. nat.* IV 984 (parte prima)” and “Lucrezio, *de rer. nat.* IV 984 (parte seconda)”; O’Keefe, “Does Epicurus Need the Swerve,” *Epicurus on Freedom*, and “Action and Responsibility”; Purinton, “Epicurus on ‘Free Volition’ and the Atomic Swerve”; Bobzien, “Did Epicurus Discover the Free Will Problem?”; Mitsis, “How Modern is Freedom of the Will?”; Russell, “Epicurus and Lucretius on Saving Agency”; Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*; Wendlandt and Baltzly, “Knowing Freedom”; Maso, “Clinamen ciceroniano”; Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 218–55 and “Swerves and Voluntary Actions”; Németh, *Epicurus on the Self*, 92–107, 133–165.

<sup>48</sup> Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 323.

<sup>49</sup> For a more detailed analysis of each of the three sections, see Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action*, 63–74. Some of the present analysis is based on my earlier account. For a slightly different outline of the section, see Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 323.

<sup>50</sup> Lucretius’s account makes clear that *libera voluntas*, or the ability to act voluntarily, applies to all living creatures, human and non-human alike.

<sup>51</sup> For a different view, see Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 237–39, who suggests that Lucretius is not arguing simply that the *voluntas* exists, but that the capacity of the mind to form the *voluntas* exists. This is part of her argument that the swerve is not involved in every voluntary action, but as Furley, *Two Studies in the Greek Atomists* and Bobzien, “Did Epicurus Discover the Free Will Problem?” have argued, that it is designed to introduce a non-deterministic element in character formation.

<sup>52</sup> Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 328; and Sharples, “Epicurus, Carneades, and the Atomic Swerve,” 182.

<sup>53</sup> The manuscripts read *res* instead of *mens*. *Mens* is Lambinus’s emendation which is accepted by most editors. See Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 326–27.



<sup>54</sup> One place where we might have expected an account of the role the swerve plays in the voluntary actions of living creatures is in Lucretius 4.877–906. Although Lucretius does not explicitly mention the swerve in the passage, I agree with those who believe that given the account of the swerve in Lucretius 2.251–93, the swerve must be assumed to play a role in the process described at 4.877–906. For different views on what role the swerve may have played in this account, see Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action*, 121–26; Purinton, “Epicurus on ‘Free Volition’ and the Atomic Swerve,” 276–79; and Fowler, “Lucretius on the *Clinamen* and ‘Free Will’ (II 251–93),” 338–44 and *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 415–20.

<sup>55</sup> For some of the suggestions made about the role the swerve plays in voluntary action, see Asmis, *The Epicurean Theory of Free Will* and “Free Action and the Swerve”; Fowler, “Lucretius on the *Clinamen* and ‘Free Will’ (II 251–293)” and *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*; Saunders, “Free Will and the Atomic Swerve in Lucretius”; Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action*; Sharples, “Epicurus, Carneades, and the Atomic Swerve”; Purinton, “Epicurus on ‘Free Volition’ and the Atomic Swerve.”

<sup>56</sup> For variations on this position, see Asmis, *The Epicurean Theory of Free Will* and “Free Action and the Swerve”; Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action*; Sharples, “Epicurus, Carneades, and the Atomic Swerve”; Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of the Mind*, 186; Purinton, “Epicurus on ‘Free Volition’ and the Atomic Swerve.”

<sup>57</sup> Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 322–39, 405–27.

<sup>58</sup> Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action*, 146–51. In all of the mental activities described in the Book 3 passages listed, Lucretius writes as if the mind’s atoms are self-moving.

<sup>59</sup> Cic. *Fat.* 23: “Epicurus introduced this theory [of the swerve] because he feared that, if the atom were always carried along by the natural and necessary force of weight, nothing would be free for us, since the mind would move as it was forced to by the motions of the atoms” (*nihil liberum nobis est, cum ita moveretur animus ut atomorum motu cogeretur*).

<sup>60</sup> Furley, *Two Studies in the Greek Atomists*; Bobzien, “Did Epicurus Discover the Free Will Problem?”; Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*.

<sup>61</sup> That the swerve was thought to preserve “what depends on us” or “what is up to us” is well attested in a number of ancient sources, including Phld. *Sign.* 36.14 (τὸ παρ’ ἡμᾶς); Cic. *ND* 1.69 (*in nostra potestate*); and Plu. *Mor.* 964c (τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῶν).

<sup>62</sup> Conway, “Epicurus’ Theory of Freedom of Action”; Pope, “Epicureanism and the Atomic Swerve”; Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory*; Wendlandt and Baltzly, “Knowing Freedom”; O’Keefe, *Epicurus on Freedom*; Németh, *Epicurus on the Self*.

## CHAPTER 10

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# FRIENDSHIP

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PHILLIP MITSIS

IN the nearly fifty years since John Rist's classic discussion of "the problem of friendship" in Epicureanism,<sup>1</sup> no scholarly consensus has emerged about how to interpret the muted evidence for Epicurus's view or even, in a deep sense, about what counts as evidence for his view. Indeed, these two questions have become so intricately entwined that it is fair to say, I think, that those who generally take a more restricted view of the textual evidence tend to attribute to Epicurus a narrowly self-regarding conception of friendship. Conversely, those who take more expansive views, especially regarding claims made by Cicero, Lucretius, and Philodemus, typically conclude that Epicurus took on board, or at least, might have given reasons for his followers to think that he took on board, the commonplace notion that in order to be genuine and trustworthy friends, individuals must not treat each other solely as instruments for personal gratification. Rather, they should view or, at least, act towards one another in ways that go beyond mere self-regard. Whether Epicurus embraced such a disinterested view of friendship—either as part of an indirect hedonistic strategy or even, perhaps, at the cost of consistency with the central tenets of his hedonism—still remains a matter of further disagreement, however, even among those who hold more sanguine views about the value of later evidence.



Since Rist's discussion, three general views of Epicurean friendship have gathered the most scholarly support:

- (1) Epicurus takes friendship to be strictly self-regarding. Any texts of Epicurus that have been taken to hint at or endorse disinterested friendship have been misinterpreted and any later attributions of such a view to him, even by Epicureans, are misunderstandings that resulted in the undoing or abandonment of his original position. This view often further assumes or is explicitly bolstered by a particular picture of ancient Epicurean social practices in which cohesive groups of Epicurus's followers participated in mutually advantageous conventions of help, confidence in that help, and so on, but without valuing each other either as individuals or in their own right.
- (2) Epicurus recommends *behaving* towards friends in non-self-regarding ways, but only as part of a larger, indirect, hedonist strategy whose overall goal is still purely self-regarding.
- (3) Epicurus thinks we should regard and treat friends in non-self-interested ways even though this might appear to conflict with the demands of his overall hedonism. It is unclear whether he merely was unaware of a potential inconsistency or whether he perhaps believed that his hedonism was able to encompass disinterested friendships. He might have thought, for instance, that his conception of pleasure could include, without contradiction, the pleasures of disinterested friendship, thus maintaining the consistency of both his hedonism and egoism.

These are broad categories and not all scholarly accounts fit snugly within them. Nonetheless, they reflect three general strategies typically used by historians of philosophy when facing a seeming contradiction: eliminate one of the inconsistent elements; try to show how, all things considered, both can fit into a larger pattern; or embrace the contradiction and attempt to explain its sources, even perhaps commending it for being ultimately philosophically productive or, at least, honest. Rather than declaring any outright winner among these—indeed, I doubt that is possible—I will try to give an account of some of the salient methodological and interpretive

disagreements that have arisen among proponents of these three positions. Occasionally, I will also linger in more detail over a few particularly problematic evidential and textual flashpoints that so far have mostly led to stand-offs. Any hope of squaring this particular circle at the moment seems distant, but the problem of friendship raises some of the most wide-ranging and significant questions about the overall nature and goals of Epicurus's ethics, a few of which I try to touch on here.

Let us first turn to the few texts of Epicurus that all parties to the dispute must take into account, starting with his ringing assertion about the fundamental importance of friendship. At *KD* 27, Epicurus proclaims that of all the things that wisdom provides for the blessedness of life as a whole (*εἰς τὴν τοῦ ὅλου βίου μακαριότητα*), by far the greatest is the acquisition of friendship. Elsewhere, friendship is said to dance around the world calling us to awaken to blessedness (*ἐπὶ τὸν μακαρισμόν* *SV* 52)<sup>2</sup>; and in a similar vein, Epicurus seems to up the ante by calling friendship an “immortal” (*ἀθάνατον*) good, in comparison even to wisdom, which is merely a mortal one (*SV* 78). Associations with the divine are perhaps hinted at as well in the *Letter to Menoeceus* which concludes with the claim that “you will live like a god among men” (*ζήσεις δὲ ὡς θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις*) by studying/practicing Epicurus's precepts “day and night” with “one like yourself” (*τὸν ὅμοιον σεαυτῷ*), hence, arguably, a friend.<sup>3</sup>

But along with these promises of blessedness and immortal goods, maintaining friendships in Epicurus's view might involve great pains or require great sacrifices. This is because an Epicurean sage would experience no less pain when his friend is tortured, perhaps,<sup>4</sup> than when he himself is, and he also would be willing to lay down his life for a friend; his whole life, moreover, would be thrown into confusion were there a breach of trust with a friend or a betrayal (*SV* 56–57; cf. *DL* 10.121b). This is perhaps one of the reasons we need to be careful in choosing the right kinds of friends, since we must risk pleasures in order to gain the pleasures of friendship (cf. *SV* 28). The importance of trust between friends is raised as well in *SV* 34, where we are told that it is not so much the help of friends that we need as our assurance of that help (*τῆς πίστεως τῆς περὶ τῆς χρείας*). Our understanding of the reliability of friendship, moreover, is anchored in the same understanding as other central Epicurean insights, as *KD* 28 further elaborates:

The same thinking that equips us to be confident that nothing terrible is either eternal or even for very long, gives us within these same limits to understand friendship's security (safety, reliability, secureness) as being most complete (*ἀσφάλειαν φιλίας μάλιστα κατεῖδε συντελουμένην*).<sup>5</sup>

Relations of utility and friendship are touched upon in SV 23, though both the text and its interpretation have been much disputed.<sup>6</sup> Hermann Usener corrected the manuscript which reads, "Every friendship is by itself a virtue, though it has taken its beginning from benefit" to "Every friendship is choiceworthy for itself, though it has taken its beginning from benefit" (*Πᾶσα φιλία δι' ἑαυτὴν αἰρετὴ* [Usener: *ἀρετὴ* MSS] *ἀρχὴν δὲ ἐΐληφεν ἀπὸ τῆς ὠφελείας*). Both of these readings have been used as fulcrums for larger interpretations, though even proponents of the same general position have disagreed over which of them is more likely.

Our evidence, therefore, is slim and filled with serious textual difficulties, but it might be useful to offer a few preliminary and non-partisan observations. On the face of it, Epicurus's various statements run the gamut from a few claims that at first glance look as if they might be motivated by attitudes of emotional sympathy,<sup>7</sup> other-regard,<sup>8</sup> or by religious sentiment and divine aspiration,<sup>9</sup> while others might suggest an easy and transparent<sup>10</sup> or shrewd and cautious egoism.<sup>11</sup> But none offers any explicit statement about the value of friends per se. Those who think Epicurus is an egoist of some stripe argue that this is exactly what we should expect, though by the same token, there is nothing here that explicitly claims that friends are to be viewed only instrumentally. Others, thinking that the tenor of some of his claims requires something stronger than purely instrumental attitudes towards friends, have relied on later reports that Epicurus thought that we should value our friends as much as ourselves, often in conjunction with a particular reading of SV 23. Accordingly, proponents of egoism, given their own inability to offer any explicit textual basis for the instrumentality of friendship, have arguably been tasked, perforce, with explaining how these later sources at times could be so mistaken.

The silence of Epicurus's surviving texts on this crucial question of the value of friends thus creates a scholarly impasse. Egoist accounts that stress, for instance, the importance of mutual security for Epicureans and the putatively instrumental nature of such relations can point to no texts that

explicitly claim that Epicurean friends value each other merely as instruments to their security. So, for example, Pylades and Orestes<sup>12</sup> provided each other with help and protection and were willing to die for one another, but they were not friends only for the sake of that protection. Clearly, I may receive help from a friend without that help being the sole motive for my friendship or its goal. Similarly, the mere fact that two people are useful to each other for protection is not sufficient to make them friends without some further personal, affective attachment.<sup>13</sup> My burglar alarm provides me with security, but only an advertising company could describe it as “my friend.” Thus, the burden of proof arguably remains on egoist accounts to explain how affective attachments of the sort suggested by some Epicurean evidence—and not merely the pretense of affective attachment—can be generated from purely egoistic motives. There also remains the question of whether egoist accounts can convincingly explain the links Epicurus himself seems to suggest between friendship and blessedness, divinity, and so on, given that the gods provide a model of friendship not based on mutual utility. Conversely, those who think that Epicurus’s views cannot be explained without the claim that friends should value each other in their own right are unable to point to any unambiguous statement to that effect in the surviving texts of Epicurus himself. Thus, on the basis of evidence from these few texts alone, any account of Epicurean friendship must dance, if not around the world, at least around a glaring hole at the very center of its arguments.

## FRIENDSHIP AS SELF-REGARDING

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I begin with a family of views that attribute to Epicurus a transparently self-regarding conception of friendship.

Proponents of these views are able to begin building their case with a powerful initial argument. Throughout the extant corpus, Epicurus insists over and over again that our *eudaimonia* consists in our bodies being in a healthy pain-free condition (*aponia*) and our minds being in a tranquil and undisturbed psychic state of *ataraxia* (cf. *Men.* 128 ff.). The achievement of these twin internal conditions, he claims, is what comprises our *eudaimonia* and, therefore, is what we all aim at as our natural *telos*. All of his extant

arguments for his hedonism, which he further identifies with “living blessedly” (*Men.* 128), depend on identifying pleasure with these two subjective inner states of individuals and he nowhere directly includes other-regarding elements, features, characteristics, etc. in his descriptions of them. Nor is it particularly clear, even if he had so wished, how he might have done so.

Some scholars have wondered about the extent to which Epicurus is committed to psychological and/or ethical egoism,<sup>14</sup> but whatever the verdict on this question, the general starting point, final goal, and overall structure of his ethical theory would seem to leave no obvious place for a notion of valuing others for their own sakes. When coupled with Epicurean denials that we have any natural instincts for social solidarity, even at the level of family,<sup>15</sup> it seems that the whole thrust of Epicurus’s ethical project tells against valuing others non-instrumentally, even if they are friends.

Tim O’Keefe, in an important and systematic paper,<sup>16</sup> makes this overall structural point with special clarity and argues that there is consequently a strong presumption based on the principle of charity to conclude that Epicurus endorses treating friends instrumentally.<sup>17</sup> Of course, charity, even of the philosophical variety, often can be misplaced and with detrimental results, and it is not clear to me that this argument, which is a common refrain among many of this view’s defenders, necessarily has the kind of bedrock status that it sometimes tries to assume. One does not have to take an Emersonian view of inconsistency or tout its merits in order to observe that as historians, we often come across inconsistencies, some of them gross, when reading long, connected passages in the great philosophers. Depending on our views about their styles of argument, we try to assess the nature of the inconsistency, its sources, whether there are any developments in their views that explain inconsistencies among different works, and so on. With Epicurus, on the other hand, we mostly are faced with little floating wisps of evidence that have broken loose from different contexts, chronological periods, and for some of the most important collections of these, the jury is even out about what bits are from Epicurus himself. In trying to piece together actual arguments and recognizable positions, we typically cannot hope to wield the kinds of tools to test consistency that interpreters, say, of a Platonic dialogue or of a treatise by Locke can.

So, for instance, if Locke's corpus had fallen into a state similar to that of Epicurus's, what would be the best way to go about handling his commitments to the importance of making decisions in light of the moral law along with his strong endorsements of hedonism? Many have thought Locke inconsistent on this score, since it is not easy to see at first glance how these twin commitments are meant to go together. But if we were faced with trying to put together several remaining Lockean fragments endorsing hedonism, an ambiguous and lacunose statement about the moral law, and a certain amount of criticism from his contemporaries claiming to see a contradiction in these two commitments, it is not clear to me that the principle of charity would necessarily demand that we view him strictly as a doctrinaire hedonist. If we did, we would arguably miss out on what some have found inconsistent, but others have deemed explicable and philosophically productive in Locke's overall theory.

Correspondingly, with Epicurus we find strong endorsements of hedonism and a few emphatic general claims about the importance of friendship for a blessed life that are coupled with particular claims about the sacrifices friends make for each other, the help they can offer, and a few glimmers of what might suggest the possibility of non-egoistic attitudes among friends. These are augmented by a lot of static both among later Epicureans and in the doxography suggesting that Epicurus himself embraced friendships that were not entirely instrumental. My analogy to Locke, of course, is hardly innocent, but given the welter of possibilities, I think it safer to remain an agnostic about what philosophical charity demands in this case, since one might with equal plausibility claim that it demands trying to ferret out the reasons Epicurus might have been committed to both hedonism and non-instrumental friendships.

By the same token, those who advance demands for consistency tend to make the claim that it would be extremely odd for Epicurus to be inconsistent on this one topic alone. But again, this is hardly a knockdown argument, since some of our most important evidence suggests that the relation of hedonism and friendship became the source of a *disputatio* (cf. Cic. *Fin.* 1.66) not only with their critics, but also among Epicureans themselves. If Epicurus's views about friendship were so smoothly compatible with his hedonism, it strikes me as unlikely that all the subsequent internal and external fuss would have occurred, especially given, as we are also often reminded in this context, later Epicureans

typically were so firm in their adherence to his doctrines, even in the face of criticism by opponents. But in any case, these are all extremely general considerations that are not likely in and of themselves to move the argument forward, so it may be helpful to turn to the arguments for a strict egoism in more detail.

Egoistic readings of the evidence, however, have often led to widely diverging pictures of the kinds of relations that Epicurean friends purportedly had with each other. I begin with a rosier view. In an influential paper, David O'Connor articulated what he characterized as an alternative ideal of Epicurean friendship and argued that we can best come to understand this ideal in the context of the social practices of Epicurean communities. The goal of these various practices within the Garden, he claims, was to create a sense of communal “fellowship,” in opposition, say, to the goals of joint political action or shared theoretical investigation of the Academy. Such fellowship and solidarity also meant that Epicurean friendships were not “personal” in the way that those of “contemporary bourgeois academics” might be.<sup>18</sup> Rather, they were grounded in social practices that emphasized communal celebrations and communal pleasures for both body and mind. These consisted, on the one hand, of a “hobbit-like appreciation of good food, ample drink, and a warm fire,”<sup>19</sup> and “refresher courses”<sup>20</sup> about the central commitments of Epicurean philosophy. Even more powerful tools for shaping communal solidarity were remembrance and example, and the opportunities they provided for imitating and embodying paradigmatic Epicurean values. Taken together, these practices of supportive fellowship helped to brush a protective coat of varnish on the general contentment of Epicureans living within their communities. They also, O'Connor claims, are ultimately behind Epicurus's written praise of friendship and his “practical arrangements for arranging the community that looked to him for leadership.”<sup>21</sup>

In its larger outlines, O'Connor's account reflects a long tradition of scholarship that takes Epicurus to be less theoretically driven than, say, his Academic neighbors, and that takes his thought to be best understood as a practical philosophy embodying specific cultish practices of solidarity, recruitment, and so on aimed at fostering personal and communal contentment. I myself harbor grave doubts that Bilbo Baggins, for instance, would find plowing through the *Περὶ τῆς ἐν τῇ ἀτόμῳ γωνίας* with his



daily pint of thin wine sufficiently *gemütlich*, even if he were reading along with Epicurus himself, but O'Connor's argument raises more pressing methodological questions. First, given the paucity of direct textual evidence, can we read off anything tangible about Epicurus's view of friendship from school practices? While such attempts have been common enough, they are not without serious, perhaps even fatal, pitfalls. Imagine trying to reconstruct, for instance, the doctrines of the Gospels, much less the teachings of the historical Jesus, on the basis of communal practices in early Christian communities. I offer this particular analogy because of the parallels often drawn between Christian and Epicurean communities. Various early Christian communities practiced infant baptism. Does this give us a license to infer that Jesus baptized infants? Surely not, nor does it really help in clarifying the admittedly meager evidence about baptism found in the Gospels. Similarly in the case of Epicureanism, even when we have some very faint evidence for a particular school practice, the actual point of that practice is likely to remain elusive. When Epicurus exhorts Menoeceus to *μελέτα πρὸς σεαυτὸν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός* (*Ep. Men.* 135)—to study or practice (*μελέτα* is wonderfully ambiguous here) day and night on his own—does this reflect the boot-camp mentality of a drill instructor breaking down the resistance of recruits through lack of sleep and continual practice in order to facilitate indoctrination and solidarity? Or is it the slight exaggeration of a benign and slightly avuncular teacher urging hard study and maybe the usefulness of a study partner? Both views of Epicurean school practices have been put forward on the basis of later evidence, whose ultimate point, however, remains sketchy at best. Either way, of course, Epicurus strikes me as being a little over-zealous for someone offering only “refresher” courses, but perhaps actual school practices were rather different from what we can divine from this passage. In sum, it seems to be anybody's guess.

O'Connor, realizing that his argument ultimately is one of *ignotum per ignotius*, is commendably forthright in claiming that his account is “frankly speculative, an appreciation of the Master's spirit rather than an interpretation of his letter”<sup>22</sup>—a detail often lost on those who subsequently have taken over his basic framework as if it were straightforward historical reconstruction and then have deduced from it further purported communal practices. Many of these papers perhaps provide fertile ground for meta-ethical speculation, but they unfortunately have little basis in what we can

hope to know about school practices in Epicurus's own time—which is exceedingly little<sup>23</sup>—much less about their actual point.

A related assumption also sometimes lurks in the background of egoist accounts. In distinguishing “fellowship” from individual “bourgeois” friendships, O'Connor invokes a particular picture of the nature of ancient social relations<sup>24</sup> that ultimately derives from a kind of perfect storm of late twentieth-century academic anthropology, Marxism, and postmodern critique. Here I can only be brutally schematic, but this view came into being through an admixture of anthropological claims that in ancient societies friendship was an assigned not an achieved relation, together with Marxist claims about social relations in pre-capitalist societies as opposed to those among alienated individualist bourgeois; and it was topped off with claims about “the self” being an early modern invention. One conclusion of this influential paradigm was that friendship in antiquity was not an intimate, affective attachment between individual selves, but something closer to what O'Connor describes as “fellowship.” This is not to suggest, of course, that O'Connor explicitly subscribes to any of these particular theories, but his conclusions and methodology often keep in step with them. In my view, with respect to ancient Greek and Roman friendship generally, David Konstan<sup>25</sup> has put such general claims to bed for good with his detailed documentation and analysis of the emphasis on intimate, affective, and deeply personal relationships in ancient literary and philosophical sources. Again, however, if we restrict ourselves to the few remaining texts of Epicurus himself, this is unlikely to be a battle that can be won. To be sure, there is the claim that the sage will feel no less pain than his friend, perhaps even when his friend is tortured (SV 57), which strikes me as a rather supererogatory demand for lodge buddies. But the text is too insecure to withstand attacks on its own from those who promote a notion of fellowship or other impersonal forms of Epicurean friendship.

One further important lesson that the fellowship view is supposed to hold for philosophy is that individualistic notions of egoism, hedonism, and other-regard do not map neatly onto the communal character of ancient Epicurean relations, and thus can distort our conceptions of Epicurus's real concerns. The plausibility of this claim will come to the fore when we look at subsequent direct and indirect accounts below, but for now we can turn to egoistic accounts that offer a picture of relations in Epicurean communities that are more studied, calculated, and ultimately grim.

In a paper notable for its argumentative crispness, Matthew Evans argues that Epicurean friendship is directly egoistic, but despite that, Epicureans can be friends, just so long as we understand that friendship does not require that friends value one other for their own sakes. Indeed, Epicurus's hedonism, Evans claims, requires him to reject this "valuation condition" as a species of practical irrationality<sup>26</sup> and to argue that friends should treat each other only instrumentally. As we have seen, Epicurus nowhere explicitly makes such an argument, so Evans must try to reconstruct one to anchor his account of "direct" egoism. He begins by attempting to link, or better, to reduce friendship's value to mutual security. "Often, he (Epicurus) suggests that its value lies in the security it affords."<sup>27</sup> Actually, I count one possible suggestion at best, *KD* 28, where we perhaps find the claim that *one* valuable benefit of friendship is security, and even that depends on a reading of the Greek that is hardly the most natural. Security, especially from others, is a value closely linked not to friendship, but to justice (*KD* 6, 7, 13, 14, 39, 40).<sup>28</sup> To be sure, in later texts we hear about the sense of safety and comfort, psychological and otherwise, that friendship provides, but typically only as one of many other valuable benefits from friendship. These drop out of the picture here, but it is worth following out Evans's claim, especially since it regularly shows up in the literature in similar incarnations.

What is the security provided by friendship supposed to consist of, then? Here Evans dials up a single passage from *Epistulae Morales* 9.8 in which Seneca asserts that he is citing a letter of Epicurus and claims that unlike Stoics, who have friends in order to help others, Epicureans have friends only in order to gain help from them. It is worth looking at Seneca's letter more closely, however, and also at the nature of the contrast he is making. Seneca is addressing the general question of whether the self-sufficiency of the wise man precludes his having friends. He himself endorses Stilpo's famous and, for many Stoics, exemplary declaration of self-sufficiency and indifference to all external losses when his city and family were destroyed (*omnia mea mecum sunt*). Yet, although the wise man is utterly self-sufficient, he will not only have friends, Seneca claims, but he alone is able to live solely for another in everything, "in a commonalty (*consentium rerum omnium*) that is grounded in the bond shared among all human beings."<sup>29</sup>

According to Seneca, Epicurus attacked this notion of self-sufficiency in a letter by arguing that the wise man has friends “in order to have someone to sit beside him when he is sick or to come to his aid when he is cast into bonds or is in want” (*ut habeat, qui sibi aegro adsideat, succurrat in vincula coniecto vel inopi . . .*). The Stoics do the reverse. They have friends in order to sit with them when they are sick or to set them free when they are in bonds. Even if the ultimate purpose of a friend in Seneca’s account seems to be only to furnish an excuse for a Stoic to exercise his virtue, still, the Stoic *sapiens*, because of his self-sufficiency, is better able to give to others. Interestingly, this latter sentiment echoes rather nicely Epicurus at SV 44 (cf. Plutarch *Non posse* 1097a), but Seneca is keen to use Epicurus in this letter as a foil. For the Stoic, Epicurus both undermines the self-sufficiency of the wise and destroys the proper motivation for friendship.

So the question arises, do we have reason to trust this report of the instrumentality of Epicurean friendship? We are better informed about Epicurean attacks on Stilpo in the realm of epistemology, but presumably in this context Epicurus may have argued against Stilpo’s view of self-sufficiency, for example, by touting the importance of *aponia*, health, and other things classed by the Stoics as indifferents for one’s happiness. Our evidence for Epicurus’s views about self-sufficiency are complicated at best, but we might initially have expected Seneca to ridicule the need for such comforts from friends for an Epicurean sage whose happiness is supposed to be immune to sickness and even torture on the rack. His criticism, however, quickly turns its focus away from self-sufficiency. It is not the Epicurean sage’s desires for what Stilpo takes to be indifferent—and here it is perhaps worth remembering Seneca’s own pre-occupation with physical health and sickness—it is the selfishness of those desires that Seneca holds up for criticism.

Perhaps if we had Epicurus’s *Περὶ δώρων καὶ χάριτος*, we would be in a better position to assess Seneca’s claims about Epicurean motives in giving, but is it likely that Epicurus himself ever wrote that the wise man has a friend simply *in order to* have someone to sit with him when he is sick, visit him when he is in bonds, and so on? It is hard not to notice, moreover, that Seneca’s claim is embedded in an argumentative context that aims to make the strongest rhetorical contrast between Epicurus’s view and his own. Undeniably, the antithesis makes for a clever rhetorical flourish: we Stoics only want to help our friends; Epicureans only want to get help from them.

But neither claim is plausible in such a crude and simplistic form, and in the course of the letter, Seneca slowly backs away from this clever formulation of the Stoic view. Epicurus's view does not receive a similar fine-tuning (cf. SV 39). If one wanted to speculate, I would think it more plausible to suppose that in arguing against Stilpo's claim about self-sufficiency, Epicurus might have said that the wise man and his friends offer each other mutual support and that the *sapiens* benefits from them in ways that show that he is not utterly self-sufficient in the sense of *omnia mea mecum sunt*. This is as much as he needs to attack Stilpo's claim. Epicurus might even have said that friendships grow out of such needs (cf. SV 23). But to counter Stilpo's claim about self-sufficiency, he does not need to argue that the only point or goal of friendship is to merely fill particular needs, such as having a visitor when sick. Seneca's question about the motives for friendship is a red herring, since having friends whom I value for their own sakes may likewise threaten my self-sufficiency. It is doubtful, therefore, that he provides sufficiently secure evidence to ascribe to Epicurus the claim that the motive for friendship is simply to secure these kinds of help. Moreover, even if we were to give credence to Seneca's account, Evans's claim that Epicurus attributes the value of friendship to the security it affords still remains at best an extremely hasty generalization from one instance that, in any case, is slightly off-target.<sup>30</sup>

Rather than letting Evans's argument grind to a halt here, however, it is perhaps worth following it out because its next steps raise important and long-standing questions about the relation of friendship and justice in Epicurus's thought. Evans next links his claim about the importance of security to the question of trust between friends raised in SV 34, where we are told that it is not so much the help of friends that we need as our assurance of that help.<sup>31</sup> To help understand the mechanisms of trust and the way that they structure friendships among Epicurean egoists, Evans offers Epicurus a number of "fruitful" parallels<sup>32</sup> from Epicurean doctrines about justice. Thus, for instance, if a sage were worried about the reliability of a friend, he might fortify himself with the thought that, like law-breakers, untrustworthy friends in a community of Epicureans cannot escape the fear of detection. By the same token, a sage might need to relax his requirement of trusting a friend and to merely act *as if* he trusts an untrustworthy friend so that it assures him of help from other Epicureans. Then there is the problem raised by untrustworthy free riders on the trust of the community

and so on and so forth. Many of these problems of individuals slipping through the Epicurean “security net” can perhaps be met “if friendship is nested in a relatively broad community of Epicurean agents—such as the Garden . . .”<sup>33</sup> and, we should add, I think, if Epicurean friends are treating one another as potentially hostile neighbors and in accordance with the mutually suspicious and self-regarding canons of Epicurean justice. We should also add that it is hardly clear that any of the mechanisms based on mutual fear and suspicion that we find in contracting agents in the realm of justice apply to the attitudes and behavior of sages. Thus, it is unclear, indeed doubtful, that they can be incorporated into the sage’s attitudes towards friends.

When last we left an imaginary Epicurean Garden, friends were unselfconsciously enjoying the fellowship of communal feasts and a warm fire. Evans, however, asks us to imagine a “community of Epicurean agents” (an unintended ambiguity, no doubt) in which Menoeceus and his messmate regard one another almost with the same attitudes as two dissidents huddled over a samizdat text fearing that the other might be an *inofficielle Mitarbeiter* of the Stasi. On this view, even Epicurus, it seems, cannot completely trust his Ministers of Internal and External Security. It is true, of course, that Torquatus at *Fin.* 1.65 speaks of Epicurus maintaining a huge flock of friends bound together by a *conspiratio*, but I think the Latin there, especially since Torquatus describes it as a *conspiratio amoris*, suggests a unity or harmony of love, though, perhaps, Cicero is merely reporting a clever example of an Epicurean *Zersetzung* aimed at their philosophical enemies. At any rate, Evans argues that such agents will come to have friendships characterized by many of the behaviors typical of non-instrumental friendships. They will appear cheerful, solicitous, giving, etc., since these traits can be instrumentally valuable in getting others to help them, though it seems to me unlikely that such purely instrumental behaviors can get one all the way to feeling no less pain than a friend when he is tortured. Although Evans dismisses such worries as irrelevant to his project, one might wonder whether agents can actually be solicitous when their motives in helping friends are unconnected to any non-instrumental concern for their friends’ well-being. But more generally, we might wonder as well, in this community founded on strategies of trust and mistrust, what has happened to the *μακαριότης* and the immortal good that was promised from friendship?



In the evidence for Epicurus's views that I set out at the beginning, I suggested that there seemed to be a rough division between what appear to be more affective, perhaps altruistic, and even divine elements in friendship, and those that may reflect a more cautious and canny egoism. This is hardly an original observation, of course, since the relation of these two registers has for a long time raised fundamental methodological questions. Moreover, the tension between them becomes even more pronounced when, in search of larger structures of Epicurean social theory, elements from Epicurus's theory of justice and social formation are incorporated more broadly into his account of friendship. We have seen, for instance, in Evans's argument, the logical conclusion of following out one side of this evidence in combination with elements from the theory of justice. Some scholars have argued that there are certainly Epicurean precedents for mixing together elements of justice and friendship in this way, since we find such an amalgam in Lucretius's and Hermarchus's descriptions of the origins of societies and their mechanisms of development.<sup>34</sup> Justice and friendship emerge in these accounts in overlapping contexts and from similar affective beginnings.

Consequently, there arises a question not only about the nature of Epicurus's own view about the relation between justice and friendship, but also its relation to later expositions of their common beginnings. The problem has been attacked in various ways. Victor Goldschmidt, for instance, attempted to sort the *Kyriai Doxai* into separate groupings to show how they correspond to various divisions among the domains of friendship, justice, and social formation.<sup>35</sup> Others have tended to collapse the evidence for all of these domains within larger constructs of a general social theory<sup>36</sup> or of school practice. David Konstan's recent seminal analysis of ancient friendship has complicated the discussion further, however, with his argument that there are different registers between *φίλος* and *φιλία*. The latter encompasses wider social and familiar relations that include concerns about *ἀσφάλεια*, justice, and so on, while *φίλος* corresponds to "friend" in the sense of an intimate, personal relation. He argues that, for Epicurus, *φιλία* is an affective, stable relation of other-regard, love, and altruism associated with happiness that arises across a wide range of social relations. It is often best studied in its origins and early development. The relations of *φίλοι*, in contrast, are based for Epicurus on relations of personal loyalty and mutual utility. It was only in the centuries following his death, Konstan



claims, that the relations of *φίλοι* began to be discussed in terms not only of mutual utility, but also of *philia* as well. Such things as emotional attachment or, for instance, sincerity, as evidenced in Philodemus's *Peri Parrhesias*,<sup>37</sup> increasingly began to become topics for reflection among later Epicurean *φίλοι* as they were faced with living with one another in a close community.

This kind of nutshell summary hardly does justice to all the ramifications of Konstan's powerful arguments, but in a brilliant response, Alain Gigandet<sup>38</sup> argues that the original tension between cautious egoism and other-regard in the evidence for Epicurus's view still crosses the line that Konstan attempts to draw between *philos* and *philia*. For instance, the personal loyalty that Konstan sees underlying the sage's attitude to his *φίλος* in SV 56 would not be explicable, Gigandet argues, unless he valued his friend as much as himself. By the same token, the use of *philia* in *KD* 28 reflects an emphasis on subjective personal trust more in line with the concerns of *φίλοι*. Gigandet takes these and other instances that he analyzes to be indications that Epicurus was actually rethinking and revising conceptions of both *philia* and *philo*i from the very beginning. Whereas Konstan had argued that Epicurus himself was not particularly concerned with relations of *philo*i, Gigandet suggests that it would be unlikely if Epicurus, who is so keen on the powers of reason and rational evaluation, would favor inherited, social, and institutional ties over those that require reflective evaluation and autonomous choice in order to assess their contribution to *ataraxia* and *aponia*.

Similarly, Epicurus's concerns about the nature of *ataraxia*, autonomy, and our invulnerability to chance would put the nature of relations among philosophical *philo*i at the very center of what we might call the high philosophical discourse about the nature of our individual selves and the conditions of our happiness. Moreover, while SV 78 and *KD* 28, for instance, raise these kinds of questions about individual *ataraxia*, they also open a window onto the wider question of sociability in general and the possibility of giving *philia* as well a rational defense. In *KD* 28 it is *gnōmē*—rational judgment—that convinces us of the reliability of *philia*. We should see Epicurus, therefore, Gigandet argues, as also holding up traditional features of *philia* for examination in the light of their contribution to autonomy and invulnerability. Although Konstan argues that we can see the origins of sociability and something that approaches altruism

in Lucretius's account in *DRN* 5,<sup>39</sup> for instance, origins do not explain why we as individuals should rationally adopt such other-regarding attitudes. The outcome of Epicurus's examination of *philia*, Gigandet argues, results, therefore, in replacing traditional *philia* and its social structures with a social life among *philoï*—rational friends who have reflected on the philosophical questions that we see mooted for instance, in Cicero's *De finibus*. To see these in more detail, we can now turn to Cicero's account and also to the possible evidence for indirect egoism and altruism that scholars have noted there.

At *De finibus bonorum et malorum* 1.65–70, Cicero, through the character of Torquatus, offers our most detailed and seemingly systematic surviving account of Epicurean views of friendship. It is worth remembering, however, that this work has a particular focus and that its overall structure and arguments clearly reflect it.<sup>40</sup> Cicero is examining what the *fines* (limits, ends, criteria, etc.) of goods and of evils are in various rival philosophical theories and in the first two books he sets himself the project of presenting and criticizing the Epicurean claim that pleasure serves as a final end or goal for our actions. One recurring problem in his account is that he glosses the notion of *finis* with terms having different valences and, thus, those wishing to extract from Cicero's discussion Epicurus's original view of friendship are faced with the problem that he often describes the relation of friendship to pleasure in terminology imprecise enough to encompass different theoretical outlooks. By the same token, his discussion presents several further formidable obstacles and again no consensus has emerged on how to overcome them.<sup>41</sup> One problem is that from the outset we are confronted with descriptions of friendship in a Latin vocabulary that are often emotionally charged<sup>42</sup> in a way reminiscent of, say, Montaigne speaking about his friendship with La Boétie. This is aided, no doubt, by the perceived etymological connections between *amicitia* and *amor* that Cicero plays on (cf. *De amicitia* 8). We should not assume, though, that this directly captures the particular emotional nuances of Epicurus's original theory.

Perhaps the most difficult and problematic feature of Cicero's presentation, however, is that it is structured around the claim that true friendship requires us to love friends as much as ourselves (e.g. *aeque amicos et nosmet ipsos diligamus*, *Fin.* 1.67). Some would argue that this

shows that Cicero is viewing questions of Epicurean friendship through the lens of solidifying professional disputes over generations both within and without Epicurean circles. On the other hand, Gigandet, as we have seen, has made a strong case for these philosophical controversies going back to Epicurus himself, though not necessarily in this exact form. It is this slippage, however, between Cicero's preoccupations and the original wider context of these philosophical questions, along with the inexactness of Cicero's vocabulary that continues to bedevil contemporary scholarship.

What is clear, however, is that Cicero relentlessly uses the requirement of friends loving one another as much as themselves throughout his criticism of Epicurean views (2.82–86) and in the service of his overall argument that hedonism is incompatible with the normative fabric of Roman ethical and political life. Even if some Epicureans think they can meet this requirement for friendship, he claims, they are being inconsistent with their overall commitment to hedonism, while other Epicureans come to realize this and give up hedonism in order to save their commitments to true friendship. Again, we have no direct evidence that such a requirement ever served as this kind of lynchpin in Epicurus's original account. Moreover, it is hard not to be suspicious of the notion of any Epicureans giving up hedonism. Thus, one often suspects that Cicero may be constructing and reifying Epicurean "positions" in order to be able to go after them later in his own response with a very blunt cleaver.

To be sure, Torquatus's presentation of these positions sometimes seems to present actual points of contact with surviving texts of Epicurus. Unfortunately, scholarly attempts to show precise correspondences have been frustrating. For example, Torquatus claims that Epicurean friends will rejoice in their friends' joy as much as their own and be equally pained by their anguish (1.67–68). At SV 56 we find the claim that the wise man will suffer (*Ἀλγέῃ μὲν ὁ σοφός*) no more than his friend who is being tortured. However literally this claim is meant to be taken, it is perhaps reasonable to infer a sage's symmetrical attitudes to a friend's pleasures as well. We might thus conclude that Torquatus is correctly reflecting a general position of Epicurus himself in saying that a wise man will feel in the same way towards his friend as he does towards himself (*Quocirca eodem modo sapiens erit affectus erga amicum quo in se ipsum . . . Fin. 68 ff.*). Not all scholars would be willing to make such an inference, however, without a more secure and directly corresponding text. Moreover, it is an even greater

jump from the affective claim that one will feel a friend's pain no more than one's own (however that is to be understood) to the general evaluative claim that Epicureans will value or, in Cicero's terminology, "love" friends as much as themselves. This is fairly typical of the elusive nature of Torquatus's account. He seems to sometimes draw near to known texts of Epicurus, but none of the positions he outlines maps directly onto those that survive. Nor, unfortunately, does his exposition straightforwardly fill in gaps that might help us put those texts coherently together with any confidence.

Torquatus begins his exposition by saying that friendship has been debated by Epicureans in three ways (1.66). Many have taken this to mean that there was a dispute among Epicureans themselves and that the three positions Torquatus presents are meant to represent reified factions or historical layers within the Epicurean school. This again seems open to question, since the three positions do not necessarily conflict and to a certain extent they might seem to address different aspects of friendship and different kinds of friends. It might just as well be the case that these three "positions" have been extracted from a variety of argumentative contexts and from arguments that Epicurus and later Epicureans used in the course of their debates with rival schools. Cicero seems to take particular relish, for instance, in the claim that the second Epicurean position on friendship appears to have conceded a crucial criticism of the Academics (1.69). Yet, the supposed concession overlaps with the two other accounts in key ways and, unlike them, it offers a causal empirical explanation of the origins of friendship of the sort one could imagine in an Epicurean text dealing with the psychological or social origins of friendship. It is not certain, then, that these three "positions" are anything more than constructions by Cicero based on a selective presentation of Epicurean arguments taken out of their immediate context.

We can make a parallel with Epicurus's account of justice. In trying to show how the virtues are compatible with hedonism, Torquatus emphasizes that, like the rest of the virtues, justice is connected to a life of pleasure and tranquility. This aretaic conception of virtue as a virtuous trait of character has correspondences in Epicurus's theory (*Ep. Men.* 132), but in other sources, Epicurus develops a contractual theory of justice.<sup>43</sup> The relation of these two strands of Epicurus's thinking about justice is left unexplored in Cicero's account, but it would be easy to construct a kind of Epicurean

*disputatio* of the following form: “some say justice is a contract,” while “others, giving in to Stoic criticism, say it is an inner virtue exemplified by sages,” and “a third group says that justice has its empirical/historical origins in rival groups beginning to feel pity for each other’s children” (cf. *DRN* 5.1119–23). These three attested positions about justice show something important about Epicurus’s overall theory, yet however ultimately consistent they are, they hardly represent the positions of three competing historical Epicurean groups.

Of the three positions on friendship described by Torquatus, the first is one that many scholars have taken to best capture at least some elements of Epicurus’s original position, though it is itself problematic as set out, and Cicero only says (2.82) that he seemed (*mihi videbar*) to recognize a dictum of Epicurus himself in it. This is further complicated by the fact that the initial part of the dictum he recognizes—that friendship cannot be sundered from pleasure—is said by Torquatus to hold for all three positions at a general level both as he opens and closes his exposition (cf. 1.70, without pleasure “no principle (*institutionem*) for friendship can be found”). Cicero, however, continues with what seems to be an allusion to *KD* 28 (see above 252), and a polemical one at that, and further links this general principle to the claim that without friends one cannot live in safety and without fear—which parallels the criticism we saw figuring prominently in Seneca. In any case, Cicero goes beyond what *KD* 28 explicitly says to the extent that we may have reason to suspect that he is only making use of the pretense of an allusion for his own purposes and to anchor a common charge made by Epicurus’s opponents.

It is also difficult to assess the various ways in which Cicero is distancing his own views from those of his character, Torquatus, and the effect that literary tropes of presentation have on the accuracy of his account. Arguably at other key places in Torquatus’s exposition of Epicurus’s doctrines, Cicero seems to be undercutting the arguments of his literary creation in a manner similar to, say, the way that Plato often handles Socrates’s interlocutors.<sup>44</sup> Thus, it is difficult to assess how much of the confusion that scholars have seen in some of the positions outlined by Torquatus is being foisted on Epicurus by Cicero and is merely part of a general strategy of showing how Epicurean accounts of the virtues and friendship are inconsistent with hedonism.

This is not the place to try to resolve these crucial questions, but it might be helpful to begin by first setting out in more detail the two accounts of Epicurean friendship marked out by Cicero as being later developments. There is not really enough independent evidence to corroborate his claim, but both offer inklings of views that are sufficiently different from any of the surviving glimpses we have in Epicurus's texts that it has led some scholars to find Cicero's assertion plausible. However, as I have suggested, these positions might just as well represent extracts of arguments culled out of context, from works by Epicurus or his followers that we no longer have. So, at least in my view, caution is in order about them being actual, distinct, later Epicurean "positions," however useful they may ultimately prove in shedding light on Epicurus's original views.

I begin with the last and briefest of the three accounts (1.70). Torquatus here describes friendship as a certain compact (*foedus quoddam*) among the wise to love their friends no less (*nec minus*) than themselves. By itself, of course, this admits of a range of interpretations. Such a pact, for instance, might be innocent of any ulterior motives for furthering some other self-interested goal. So, for instance, we might imagine two sages becoming something like "blood brothers" on recognizing their mutual virtue. Like the vow of an ideal marriage, such a pact merely puts a seal on a particular relationship as intrinsically valuable, without making it the first step in a wider egoistic strategy. Of course, a pact, just as in marriage, might also be used as a means to some further goal, and this is certainly one construal that Cicero offers in his criticism at 2.83. There is some reason for thinking that such a construal might not be a fair account of the Epicurean position, however, since in his account of compacts of justice, Epicurus gives no independent binding force to contracts themselves and argues that they are only valid so long as they reflect an individual's good. Thus, it does not seem likely that an Epicurean sage would need to try to bind another sage in a strategic contract of friendship in the hopes of furthering some long-term interest, especially since the contract in itself, if the parallel with contractual justice holds, might have no independent force and becomes void if it harms his interests. While it might initially seem plausible to see these contracts as part of an indirect strategy for maximizing pleasure, it is not at all clear that Epicurean sages would either need or abide by them as part of an indirect selfish strategy. This is not to say, of course, that contracting sages could not be genuine friends and would not be committed to each other in sub-

optimal circumstances. It is just that the Epicurean notion of a contract does not on its own serve to underwrite such commitments.

At the same time, Cicero also seems to leave open, however ironically, the possibility that such Epicurean compacts might not be purely strategic, and he suggests that the kinds of attitudes that they underwrite should be extended to loving all the virtues intrinsically as well (2.83). Whether this is ironic or not on his part, Cicero thinks that he has shown that either such compacts are made strategically for further self-interested goals, in which case the intrinsic value of the compact and, hence, true friendship is undermined, or, if the compact is indeed innocent of further self-centered goals, then like an intrinsic love of virtue, it is incompatible with Epicurus's hedonism. In trying to peer through Cicero's account to an original Epicurean argument, it is difficult to see why sages would need to make contracts with one another for either strategic or benign reasons. If contracts are strategic, they may not be binding on their own. Nor is it clear how one can enter a contract to love another as oneself, unless one already does so. If the love fades, moreover, that would seem to outweigh any contractual force. Conversely, if the contracts are merely benign, symbolic tokens of mutual love, one wonders why Epicurean sages would go in for such outer trappings in the first place. We have a certain amount of information about Epicurus and his relations with his most important followers. We also hear from Philodemus about relations of friendship among the gods. Nowhere do we hear about Epicurean sages making explicit contracts of friendship with their fellows, nor gods with gods, for either symbolic or strategic reasons. One reason for this, perhaps, is that neither sort of contract seems to make much sense in an Epicurean context. Arguments from silence can cut both ways, of course, and it might be that Cicero is indeed reporting a genuine later Epicurean position. Nonetheless, as we have seen, there are too many obstacles to make any secure inferences of any particular substance from this account to Epicurus's original position.

In turning to Torquatus's second account, which is not explicitly limited to sages, we see the same tensions presented between hedonism and the intrinsic valuation of friends, but—at least in Cicero's reckoning—more clearly resolved against Epicurus's hedonism. Torquatus relates that this group, though sharp enough (*satis acuti*—apparently unlike Epicurus himself, 2.81), are more timid (*timidiores*) than the first group because they fear that friendship will be crippled by the demands of a self-regarding



hedonism. In fact, they seem to agree with Cicero in this and are described as coming to this “more humane” (2.82) conclusion because of their fear of Academic (*vestra convicia*) censure. Torquatus explains that, for these Epicureans, friendship finds its beginnings in our initially seeking pleasure from one another, but by growing accustomed (*usus*) to each other, familiarity (*familiaritas*) results, from which blossoms (*efflorescere*) such mutual love that we come to love friends for their own sakes, even if there is no advantage (*utilitas*) from their friendship (1.69).

This account is striking for several reasons. On the one hand it seems a remarkable anticipation of the long empiricist tradition of associationist theories beginning with Locke and Hume, then on to Bentham, Mill, and Bain, and finally to contemporary connectionists. Associationists tie the cognitive armature of individuals to their experiential and causal history and treat psychological development as a mechanical empirical process. In general, Epicurus was keen on such mechano-empirical explanations of origins and we find glimpses of associationism throughout his philosophy, for instance in his account of the development of language, society, concepts, etc. On this telling, Epicurean friends come to value each other in their own right, like Epicurean sages, but these attitudes of intrinsic valuation arise, not through conscious rational choice, but through a causal and experiential process involving habit, familiarity, and growing intimacy.

What is more striking, however, and almost unheard of in the wider context of ancient ethical theorizing, is Cicero’s suggestion that the criteria grounding these friendships trump Epicurean friends’ conception and pursuit of their own *telos* or pleasure. While Peripatetics, Stoics, and even various Cyrenaics might have had to do some fancy footwork to justify valuing friends for themselves in the context of their overall theories of self-regarding good, such an explicit rejection, if that is what it is, of their own favored view of the *telos* by these Epicureans is nothing short of astonishing. We might have expected, for instance, that on coming to the realization that hedonism cannot explain disinterested friendship, they might have either given it up or shopped around for a rival theory to explain how friendships can remain part of their conception of their own good. These Epicureans, however, although *satis acuti*, persist in consciously maintaining an inconsistent set of doctrines because of their supposed fear of Academic reproach and, thus, it seems, are satisfied with remaining Epicureans only in name.

All of this is decidedly odd, and there are further difficulties in Cicero's picture. He concludes at 2.82 that this group of Epicureans abandons hedonism, though not Epicureanism, but confusingly changes terminology in criticizing their views. Whereas Torquatus says that such friendships blossom from association even if there is no utility (*nulla utilitas*) in them, Cicero describes such friendships in his critique (2.82) as occurring, even with all expectation of pleasure disregarded (*etiam omissa spe voluptatis*). While we might suppose that *utilitas* and *voluptas* are being used interchangeably in the two accounts, two potential problems present themselves. First, some scholars<sup>45</sup> have seen a connection between this second account and the claim in SV 23, "Every friendship is choiceworthy for itself, though it has taken its beginning from benefit." (Πᾶσα φιλία δι' ἑαυτὴν αἰρετή [Usener: ἀρετή MSS] ἀρχὴν δὲ εὔληφεν ἀπὸ τῆς ὠφελείας). One thing that is not clear in its compressed Greek, however, is whether friendship continues to remain beneficial while being choiceworthy (and presumably pleasurable) despite taking its origin from benefit, or whether it remains choiceworthy (and pleasureable?) even apart from benefit. Here ὠφελεία has seemed to some to correspond to *utilitas*. In Torquatus's account, though, we have an explicit wedge driven between *utilitas* and friendship not found in SV 23, and it is unclear whether this might be to serve Cicero's purposes in showing that the requirement of loving a friend intrinsically is incompatible with hedonism. One could imagine, however, given the flexibility of Cicero's vocabulary here, some friendships not being advantageous or producing utility in some sense, but still being pleasurable and thus choiceworthy.

Moreover, the notion of Epicureans giving up hedonism in the face of Academic opprobrium certainly raises suspicions and it is hard to imagine a concrete group of them consciously continuing to do so as ongoing adherents of the school. Other explanations of this "position" beckon, and it might well be, for instance, that Epicurus in a particular argumentative context gave an associationist account of the origins and growth of friendships through familiarity, some of which might and others might not foster utility or an individual's pleasure. This does not mean, of course, that Epicurus then endorsed those that do not, rather than, say, advise against them and insist that they be eliminated like other sorts of troubling personal relations. This is surely what we would expect and in many ways it strains credulity to believe that any Epicureans would hold that troubling

friendships should be maintained, regardless of their genesis. Indeed, Epicurus is clear about the costs of such troubling friendships (SV 56–57; cf. DL 10.121b). Nor is the psychological explanation of the genesis of a particular behavior sufficient to recommend it for an Epicurean; it must be held up for rational evaluation and it is this that ultimately must justify it.

In any case, as presented, this second account is easy pickings for Cicero, since, on the one hand, these Epicureans violate a cardinal rule of ancient theorizing about the *telos*, while they concede exactly what Cicero is keen to show, i.e. that hedonism cannot support the requirement that friends treat each other non-instrumentally. To the extent that they do so, however, they are more acute than their master in Cicero's eyes since they accept a dictum that he never did (2.82), that we can love our friends for their own sakes without the expectation of pleasure.

We can now turn to Torquatus's first and most extensive account. For many scholars his exposition has seemed incoherent and they have concluded that Cicero either is unfairly foisting an inconsistent argument on Torquatus or his account merely reflects the inconsistency of Epicurus's original position. Torquatus begins with the claim that some Epicureans deny that the pleasures of our friends are to be sought after as much as our own (1.66). Moreover, they further deny what seems to be the case to some of their nameless critics, that such a view undermines the *stabilitas* of friendship. He then concludes his argument by claiming that the *sapiens* will feel (*erit affectus*) exactly towards his friends in the same way as he feels towards himself and will undertake the same efforts for his friend's pleasure as for his own (1.68). At first glance, there seems to be a fairly straightforward contradiction between his opening claim and his conclusion, and we might wonder about the intervening steps. These would seem to be initially purely self-interested and strategic. Reason itself (*ratio ipsa*), he claims, advises that one acquire friends because a solitary life is filled with *metus* (fear) and *insidiae* (snares), and friendships offer reassurance and the promise of pleasure. Thus, since (1) a life of secure and continuing pleasure is not possible without friends, and (2) friendship itself requires loving friends as much as we love ourselves, as a consequence, (3) intrinsic mutual love between friends is brought about (*efficitur*) and it is connected with pleasure (*connectitur*). This central argument is followed by the claim above (1.68) about the *sapiens* that seems to serve as a purely parenthetical amplification. Then Torquatus goes on to reiterate his rather

imprecise claim about the relation between friendship and pleasure in (3). He does so by drawing a parallel to his earlier conclusion about the virtues and says that both virtue and friendship always *inhaerent* (adhere, cling to, stick fast, etc.) to pleasures (1.68). Given that Torquatus had earlier argued that the virtues are purely instrumental to pleasure, this would seem to suggest that friendship is as well. But there is also a significant disanalogy. Virtues are valued only instrumentally, whereas friends value each other as much as themselves.

At first blush, Torquatus's account seems to be a jumble of claims that perhaps reflect arguments from different contexts. The concluding assertion about the sage seems to have been tacked on to the argument in a way that is both unexplained—why this sudden claim about the *sapiens*?—and also pleonastic. By the same token, Torquatus interjects a strong non-instrumental requirement about friends' mutual regard, but leaves its exact relation to hedonism unclear. Finally, the account begins and ends with seemingly opposing views about how friends are to view and act towards one another's pleasures. For many, all this is sufficient to suggest the inability of these later Epicureans to coherently explain their justification of friendship, and it also has been tempting to read this confusion back onto Epicurus himself.

It might be helpful to begin, however, by distinguishing two competing views concerning the opening move of Torquatus's argument. He says that some Epicureans deny that the pleasures relating to our friends are to be striven for, desired, etc. (*expetendas*) as much as our own. Nonetheless he believes that they are still able to easily defend a conception of friendship that does not totter. One problem is the scope of this initial claim. Is Torquatus summarizing an overall position from the outset or is he merely beginning to build a larger argument? Dorothea Frede, for instance, takes the latter view. She argues that the claim about the lesser value of friends' pleasures is just the first step in a developmental argument in which friends later come to recognize that in order to maintain friendships they need to come to value friends' pleasures as much as their own. What distinguishes this argument from associationism, it seems, is that it appears to be a more rational and conscious process in which individuals begin from and do not lose sight of their own self-interest, even if they eventually realize that they must give up a narrow pre-occupation with it. Frede also suggests that such an account is not necessarily contradictory.<sup>46</sup> The pleasures of our friends

are not initially as desirable as our own, but they take on equal value in the course of our recognition that a warrant of real friendship comes to be provided by our shared emotions. Our friends' pleasures, that is, gain an equivalent value to our own in the context of new bonds of emotional mutuality. To Frede's picture one might also add the observation that in this account it is only within the parameters of such mutual relations that friends come to "love each other as much as themselves . . ." (*aeque amicos et nosmet ipsos diligamus . . .*), whereas in associationism, friends love others *propter se ipsos* (1.69) and mutuality is not explicitly raised as a necessary criterion for attitudes that are not purely self-interested. It may not be prudent, given the potential imprecision in Cicero's renditions, to lean too heavily on these possible differences in the attitudes of friends toward one another in these two accounts, but neither should they be discounted.

In many ways, Frede's is initially an attractive suggestion, but it still leaves unexplained exactly how this sea change in our attitudes towards friends' pleasures occurs and why it is justified. Torquatus merely says *idcirco et hoc ipsum efficitur in amicitia . . .* (1.67), without giving an account of its mechanisms or justification. More worrying is that Frede maintains that "[t]he case of friendship is, indeed, exactly analogous to that of the virtues."<sup>47</sup> This is in line with Torquatus's assertion, but virtues clearly are only a means to pleasure—a necessary means, perhaps, but still only a means. But surely if the virtues are exactly analogous to friendship, it makes friends purely instrumental to one's own pleasure as well. This is perhaps what we might have initially expected if we take Torquatus's opening sally to summarize this position, but such a view seems to directly undercut the kinds of disinterested attitudes apparently underwritten by the mutuality of loving a friend as much as oneself.

One notable line of argument tries to address this difficulty head on and to bring coherence to Torquatus's account in a different way. Eschewing a developmental view of the passage, Timothy O'Keefe offers an analysis that endorses an initial expectation that the argument will show us how friendship is compatible with friends ultimately *not* valuing the pleasures of their friends as much as their own. Whereas Frede must hold that the opening denial about the equal desirability of the pleasures of our friends (*quae ad amicos pertinerent*) reflects loose writing on Cicero's part—since, strictly speaking, those whose pleasures we view as being less valuable are not yet "real friends"—O'Keefe takes this claim at face value and thinks

that it underlies the whole argument in a crucial way. He does so by relying on an argument that, at least in embryonic form, has become prominent in contemporary defenses of indirect consequentialism.<sup>48</sup> Of course, the coherence of contemporary indirect consequentialism is hotly debated,<sup>49</sup> but O’Keefe attempts to find in Torquatus’s exposition something other than a mere farrago of Epicurean confusions or Ciceronian misunderstandings.

O’Keefe makes a distinction between our first-order and second-order strategies as friends.<sup>50</sup> My overall strategy in friendship as an Epicurean is still to maximize my pleasure, but I see that my best first-order strategy for doing so is to treat my friends’ pleasures as being equal to my own. On occasion, perhaps, this first-order strategy may not directly pay off, but by following it as a general rule, I will tend in this way to best maximize my pleasures overall. On this account, only my own pleasures remain intrinsically valuable, but in making my decisions, I recognize that the best way of achieving my second-order or higher-level goal is to behave in a way that treats my friends’ pleasures equally with my own.

For O’Keefe, Epicurean friends are not, however, engaging in what he calls “doublethink,” but instead recognizing that *in one sense* only their own pleasure has intrinsic value, while *in another sense* they do indeed love their friends as much as themselves. For the purposes of this discussion, I will eschew this language of “doublethink,” since I prefer the more neutral term of art “one thought too many.” Unlike “doublethink,” it does not raise the wider specter of societal or ideological manipulation of the sort we saw earlier in Evans’s account. Unlike some contemporary political or economic theorists who see in two-level theories a potential for manipulating individuals for a larger good, Epicurus never suggests that it would be good for a society of Epicurean friends as a whole to be manipulated into first-order other-regard and to give up any further complicating second-order thoughts about the priority of their own individual interests in order to unwittingly maximize both their own and the larger social good. In an Epicurean context, each individual must personally adopt the kind of double strategy proposed by O’Keefe.

So the question arises, why does O’Keefe think that this double strategy does not lead to the problem of holding one thought too many? At first glance, it certainly might appear that when I am acting, I must be able to hold in my thoughts both the priority of my own pleasure and the

equivalence of my friends' pleasures to my own. O'Keefe tries to meet this challenge by appealing to a distinction between beliefs and behavior. He claims that Epicureans *behave* towards friends and treat them in ways that display an equal concern for their interests, but they do so by maintaining the second-order goal of maximizing their own pleasure. This is meant to be different from Evans's claim that the Epicurean friend often will need to act with a kind of duplicity by behaving in one way, while believing something else.

In support of his claim, O'Keefe argues that Torquatus's terminology of *diligo* and *affectus erga* can be read as behavioral or dispositional terms. Thus, when Torquatus says in 1.68, *Quocirca eodem modo sapiens erit affectus erga amicum quo in se ipsum . . .*, it can have the more generic meaning that the sage "will be disposed" in the same way toward his friend as toward himself, not necessarily that he "will feel in the same way toward his friend as toward himself." I find O'Keefe's reinterpretation of the Latin unlikely, but more telling in this particular instance is its overall context. This claim about the sage follows directly from (*quocirca*) the preceding claim that "we rejoice in our friends' joy as much as in our own, and are equally pained by their sorrows" (1.67–8; Rackham). These joys and sorrows hardly seem to be merely a description of ways of treating or being disposed towards others (cf. SV 57).

More important, it is hard to see how O'Keefe's argument that these are best understood as behavioral terms can ultimately evade the problem of these wise Epicurean friends' having one thought too many. O'Keefe sometimes speaks as if when Epicureans are treating their friends' pleasures in a manner equivalent to their own, they are merely behaving in a particular way. But, of course, Epicureans think that all of our actions and behaviors are the result of particular cognitive states, so there can be no clean division between second-order *thoughts* and first-order *behaviors*.<sup>51</sup> When we are acting on behalf of our friends' pleasures, we clearly must have corresponding beliefs about their value. But it is unclear how those beliefs would not be in tension with our second-order beliefs about the primacy of our own pleasures. By the same token, even if we were to follow O'Keefe in cashing out our first-order relations to friends in terms of dispositions, when we act we would still have one disposition too many—a disposition to treat our friends' pleasures as equivalent to our own, but still another general disposition to treat our own as being more important. That



is, I doubt that an Epicurean can claim that our *diathesis* to pursue our own pleasure as primary is somehow silenced when we are disposed to treat friends' pleasures equivalently to our own. The same holds for the suggestion that Epicureans *in one sense* take their own pleasures to be primary and *in another* view their friends' pleasures as having equal value.<sup>52</sup> In whatever sense they are taking these twin commitments, they are saddled with one commitment, one sense, one disposition, or one belief too many.

O'Keefe further argues that some surviving bits of evidence (SV 34, SV 39) are compatible with his account of first- and second-order strategies. As far as I can tell, however, the thrust of these passages has other aims. At SV 34 Epicurus says that it is not so much the help of friends that we need, but the confidence of that help. But I can hold both of these thoughts at the same time since they are perfectly compatible and, in any case, what would the first-order strategy be in order to insure such confidence? Should I make it a rule to not help friends in order to bolster their confidence in me or should I aim to help them? SV 39 describes reciprocity and says that both those who are always asking for favors and those who never do get it wrong. The passage is not explicitly limited to relations of friendship, *pace* O'Keefe, but again, the worry is one of finding a proper balance. There is no suggestion that one needs to aim at one thing in order to gain another.

Annas raises the more general objection that Epicureans do not engage in multi-level strategies in their deliberations because they always are supposed to do just one thing: to always check each and every prospective choice against one's final goal, pleasure (*KD* 25; cf. *Men.* 130, ταῦτα πάντα κρίνειν καθήκει; *Men.* 132 τὰς αἰτίας ἐξερευνῶν πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς).<sup>53</sup>

Εἰ μὴ παρὰ πάντα καιρὸν ἐπανοίσεις ἕκαστον τῶν πραττομένων ἐπὶ τὸ τέλος τῆς φύσεως, ἀλλὰ προκαταστρέψεις εἴτε φυγὴν εἴτε δίωξιν ποιούμενος εἰς ἄλλο τι, οὐκ ἔσονται σοι τοῖς λόγοις αἱ πράξεις ἀκόλουθοι.

Unless at every appropriate moment you refer each one of your actions to the *telos* of nature, but first divert your avoidance or pursuit to some other thing while acting, your words will not correspond to your actions.

O'Keefe argues that the conception of deliberation we find in *KD* 25 does not preclude a two-level strategy. First of all, Epicurus, he claims, is not suggesting that we evaluate each and every one of our choices for its

hedonic payoff. He is only recommending that we evaluate our choices, desires, etc. at a more general level, a level that approaches second-order reasoning about our goals. Whether the Greek allows this is certainly arguable, since Epicurus's almost formulaic use of  $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\varsigma$  in these contexts certainly seems to rhetorically suggest "each and every" choice, action, etc. Even if we were to grant O'Keefe the generality of these claims, however, it would still leave Epicureans with the problem of balancing two general and conflicting demands when faced with individual decisions. So, for instance, I might generally come to believe that I should treat my friends' pleasures on a par with my own and, of course, I might also believe that my friends' pleasures are less valuable than mine in general. What do I do now? In some sense, the whole point of indirect consequentialism was to distinguish motives of individual actions from their overall consequences. O'Keefe's version of a two-level theory, however, ascribes the same motivation for adopting both of these general desires, i.e. to maximize my individual pleasure. In distinguishing levels, he depends on a distinction not so much between motives and consequences, but in valuing a friend's pleasure and *acting* on behalf of it. As we have seen, however, Epicurus does not hold such a view, given his account of the relation of beliefs and action. For the Epicurean, our actions are grounded in and flow from our beliefs in the kind of straightforward manner familiar from a long line of cognitivist/materialist theories. As we are acting on behalf of our friends' pleasures, we are not somehow merely acting or play-acting in a cognitive vacuum. In O'Keefe's account, Epicureans are unnecessarily saddled with contradictory thoughts, dispositions, desires, etc. Therefore, whatever difficulties we may face in putting together the various pieces of Torquatus's account, O'Keefe's sophisticated attempt at finding coherence in it, I think, falters.

One seemingly unavoidable conclusion in the face of these unsuccessful attempts at finding coherence in Cicero's account is that either he is wittingly or unwittingly foisting confusions on Epicureans or he is merely reporting the tensions in Epicurus's and his followers' thinking about friendship. For the moment, it seems that we do not have a convincing way of avoiding either of these not particularly appealing alternatives.

By way of conclusion, I will turn to evidence that is emerging from the ongoing work on Philodemus.

## PHILODEMUS

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As always, the hope is that new material from Herculaneum will come forth to help put more of the pieces together. At the same time, however, it is worth remembering Voula Tsouna's cautionary assessment in another context, "... Philodemus pressed by the objections of his rivals . . . nuances the canonical positions of his school and makes it more palatable."<sup>54</sup> At this writing, we are still waiting for new editions of critical evidence, and beyond that, the difficult work will need to begin of attempting to sift out what might be palatable nuance, innovation in the face of later polemics, or developments stemming from Philodemus's own individual preoccupations with psychological explanation, delineations of character, and expositions of Epicurean social practices in the larger context of the Roman world.

The evidence we have about Philodemus's views of friendship is embedded in discussions of such things as Epicurean pedagogy, the management of property, social conventions, the relations among gods, etc. Given the fragmentary nature of these discussions, the passing nature of his references to friendship, and Philodemus's penchant for palatable nuance, a unified and considered view of his conception of friendship is hard to come by. Tsouna, however, offers what is probably the most plausible overarching account to date. Relying partly on Cicero's presentation, she surmises that we can find in the second account of Epicurean friendship in *De finibus* not only correspondences to Philodemus's own view, but also indirect references to Philodemus himself and the circle of philosophers living in Piso's villa.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the emphasis on disinterested concern for others that we find in Cicero's second account, she argues, seems to be reflected in Philodemus's personally favored attitudes in social relations generally, in pedagogy, and in the management of external goods.

If this is the case, of course, it raises two immediate obstacles in reading evidence from Philodemus back onto Epicurus.<sup>56</sup> First, we have Cicero's insistence that this is a later, "more humane" development in Epicureanism that arose in response to Academic criticism. More troubling, as we have seen, is Cicero's claim that these Epicureans essentially give up the strict demands of hedonism in favor of a theory of friendship that lets the importance of purely disinterested attitudes towards friends trump one's

own pleasure. Thus, one is tempted to conclude that evidence from Philodemus, at least so far, is unlikely to help coherently explain the tensions we have seen in Epicurus's original texts between hedonism and disinterested friendship, since hedonism seems to lose out in this view.<sup>57</sup> This does not mean that Philodemus could not be drawing on authentic elements of disinterested attitudes from Epicurus's own texts. But at best, he seems not to be worried that this tension needs to be openly addressed; nor do we have any text in which he relates an explicit response on the part of Epicurus himself to this worry.

One further complicating factor is that Philodemus is our most extensive and detailed source for the kinds of relations enjoyed among Epicurean gods. These gods, of course, are not burdened by human practical needs, or indeed any needs from each other at all, so they are able to maintain relations of mutual affection without any concerns about mutual advantage. One question that hovers over Philodemus's various discussions is how much human beings, especially sages, can partake in corresponding relations of disinterested affectionate friendship independent of personal need. At the same time, there arises a larger question about the role of theology in Epicurus's ethics more generally. Cicero's account of Epicurean ethics is decidedly understated about the role played by theology in shaping Epicurus's ethical views, whereas, for instance, the *Letter to Menoeceus* begins with a discussion of the gods and insists that a correct view of them plays a pivotal role in one's happiness. Whether Cicero's manner of presenting Epicurus's ethical theory should best be attributed to the particular disciplinary divisions he sets, perhaps arbitrarily, between *De finibus* and *De natura deorum*, he nevertheless tends to leave us in the dark about the connections between Epicurus's various accounts of friendship and the possible theological considerations that might be giving them their particular nuances.

When we turn to Philodemus, it is perhaps not implausible to conclude that his emphasis on disinterested friendship at times resembles a species of *homoiosis theoi*.<sup>58</sup> To the extent that the pleasures of sages are equal to those of the gods, one might plausibly assume that their friendships also parallel those of the gods. Friendships among the gods in Philodemus's view are clearly pleasant, but they are not rooted in concerns about external necessities. Thus, his account also raises general questions about the nature of the relation between pleasure and utility in human friendships, and we

might wonder as well about Cicero's own moves between pleasure and utility in his discussions of Epicurean friendship and the extent to which he is merely reflecting, or perhaps exploiting elements of later developments for his own purposes.

It might be useful to offer by way of illustration a comparison that Philodemus draws between divine<sup>59</sup> and human friendship from *Gods* 3:

(fr. 87.25–32) . . . τῶν ἑξω-  
 [θ]εν χρειωδῶν ἡ συμφυλία πρὸς [τὴν] συνανα-  
 στροφήν ἀπῆι, τὰ πάθη παρὰ [δὲ] δωσιν. οὐ  
 γὰρ δυνατὸν σχεῖν τὴν συμφυλίαν ἄνευ  
 πᾶσιν ἐπιμειξίας ὄντας. ἀμέλει δὲ καὶ ἐ-  
 φ' ἡμῶν τῶν ἀσθενῶν καὶ προσδεσμένων πρὸς [τ]ὰ  
 [χ]ρ[ε]ιώδη τῆς φιλίας, οὐκέτι πρὸς τοὺς φιλοῦς ἀ-  
 πᾶσιν θέντας ἔχ[ε]ι χρείας, [οντιν'] αὐτὸς ὁ  
 (fr. 83.1–8) . . . τῶν ἡθῶν τῶν ὁμοίων [θ]αυμασμὸς ἐπὶ καὶ  
 τῆς ἄκρας οἰκειώσεως σ[υ]νέχει. καὶ τὰς ἄλλας  
 μέντοι χρείας ἀπολαμβάνουσιν παρ' ἀλλή-  
 λων, εἰ καὶ δύνανται δι' αὐτῶν παρασκευάζεσ-  
 [θαι], καθάπερ ἡμεῖς ἐνίοτε παρὰ τῶν ταῦτ' ἐχόν-  
 [των]. καὶ γὰρ τῆς ἀφῆς καὶ τῶν πρὸς τὴν ἀφ[ῆ]ν  
 καὶ τὴν [ἀκ]οήν, καὶ πάλιν τῶν ὁλων [τ]ῶν πρὸς τὴν φύσιν  
 [ἔ]ξωθεν οἰκ[ε]ί-. . . [. . .] δη καὶ. [. . . . .]  
*Gods* 3 fr. 87.25–32 (Essler)<sup>60</sup>

(fr. 87.25–32) . . . mutual friendship for the purpose of association lacks external necessities, it entrusts emotions. For it is not possible to maintain mutual friendship without there being a complete joining together. Indeed, even among us who are weak and in further need of necessities from friendship, no longer with respect to lost friends does it (friendship) have need, to whom that . . . (fr. 83.1–8) wonderment of like character holds together even to the highest peak of affection. And, indeed, they take from each other all the rest of their needs, even though they are able to provide them for themselves, just as we sometimes do from those who have the same things. For, indeed, of touch and of the things related to touch and hearing and again of all things that in accordance with nature are external, it is fitting . . .

Presumably Philodemus is talking about friendships among the gods who are in need of nothing, but join together in relations that transmit or entrust their emotions to each other. Unfortunately from this fragmentary passage we do not learn what motivates them to do so. Philodemus observes, in addition, that we do not gain any external necessities from friends that we have lost, or perhaps who have died. In a series of far-ranging papers on friendship and the virtues in Philodemus, David Armstrong has argued that

this passage makes the poignant observation that although human friendships are typically bound by mutual need, a revealing exception seems to be our relation to our dead friends. He takes this to be a significant exemplification of the kind of disinterested friendship available to us in life and that continues after the death of friends. As we delightedly think about our former mutuality of character and do so without the natural grief Philodemus thinks we are likely to feel at their initial loss, we come to think about our lost friends in a true perspective. It is not that this highest degree of friendship can only be experienced after a friend's death. But it is an experience parallel to the kinds of pleasures of mutuality that the gods continually experience in their freedom from need.<sup>61</sup>

It is perhaps plausible to see Philodemus's remark here as a further development from the claim at the end of the *Letter to Menoeceus* (135) that one will live as a god if one studies Epicureanism day and night with τὸν ὅμοιον σεαυτῷ. Whereas in Epicurus the argument is that the doctrine itself will enable one to live as a god and that it is helpful to study it with one who is akin to oneself, here the suggestion seems to be that those who have perfected their characters by means of the doctrine are able to derive ongoing pleasure from contemplating one another, even in memory. Although Philodemus does not explicitly endorse the Aristotelian claim that one comes to understand one's own character through the eyes of another, it may be that Peripatetic echoes can be faintly heard in this notion of the mutual *thaumasmos* among those whose characters are alike, especially if as Armstrong plausibly argues, such wonderment is reserved for those who have perfected their Epicurean virtue. Yet given that Epicurus and the Epicurean sage serve as exempla, there are strains in earlier Epicureanism as well that might serve to underwrite the benefits of such mutual admiration. Thus, at the human level we move from the recommendation in the *Letter to Menoeceus* to master the content of Epicurean doctrine with a friend, finally arriving at Philodemus's image of friends admiring that content as it is embodied in their friends' characters. Given the fragmentary nature of this extract, it is only a matter of supposition whether the gods too enjoy the admiration of each other's virtues and perfection, though this too seems a plausible inference and perhaps furnishes a motive for their engaging in friendship over and beyond the sharing of emotions.

At the same time, this passage seems to hold out the possibility of disinterested giving among living human friends—a notion Philodemus

takes up more widely in other works. What remains unexplained, however, in this parallel, is why gods take from each other all the rest of their needs (*καὶ τὰς ἄλλας μέντοι χρείας ἀπολαμβάνουσιν παρ' ἀλλήλων*), if they need nothing. One suspects that the puzzles we have seen for Epicurean friendship raised by the self-sufficiency of the sage merely spill over into the divine realm.

At *De elect.* 14.1–14, we find another characteristic amplification. In the *Letter to Menoeceus* (132), Epicurus had written that one cannot live a pleasant life without also living *phronimōs*, *kalōs*, and *diakaiōs*. Philodemus expands this list to include courage, temperance, magnanimity, making friends, and being philanthropic. Courage and temperance make an appearance in Torquatus's account in *De finibus*, and are part of traditional discussions of virtue, but his further expansion seems to reflect Philodemus's personal preoccupations with philanthropy and generosity, and it also perhaps serves to parry charges of philosophical rivals. However, if making friends is connected to pleasure in the same way as virtue, is it, then, merely instrumental? This would seem to conflict with other views Philodemus holds. Or is friendship inter-entailing with pleasure in the way that prudence is? We might say that the Epicurean sage will be happy and will remain *phronimos*, *kalos*, and *diakaios* even on the rack. Will he also have the opportunity of making friends and being philanthropic?<sup>62</sup> Or can he be happy on the rack without friends? One would be inclined to think so on the basis of Epicurus's strong claims about self-sufficiency, but then what justifies this Philodeman expansion? One senses in such passages that we are entering a different world with different kinds of discussions and levels of philosophical precision. Much the same can be said with the material in Philodemus about the role of friendship in teaching, in showing proper gratitude, in managing property, in combatting false flattery, and in criticizing one's peers in a constructively frank manner. However interesting in their own right, the particulars of Philodemus's account do not necessarily map onto Epicurus's texts, at least so far, in a way that helps to bring their most pressing philosophical worries into focus. Thus, they are better left to discussion in the next section of this volume on later developments and questions of reception in Epicureanism.

In closing, it is perhaps worth addressing a common and longstanding general criticism leveled against Epicurean friendship. Given the overall goals of an Epicurean life, so the objection goes, aren't the friendships of



Epicureans after all rather small beer, in the sense that they lack, in Dorothea Frede's words, "excitement and high aspirations"?<sup>63</sup> An Epicurean might make a perfectly pleasant and emotionally low-maintenance friend, someone to have over for a cup of coffee and a game of backgammon, but not someone who is going to rush out with you and try to solve climate change or distributive inequalities—however little they may contribute to such problems themselves. In short, such a life and such friends seem depressingly self-absorbed, placid, and just, well, small. As such, perhaps Epicureans are right to want to keep their lives hidden.

In the face of these charges, I will offer a slightly polemical Epicurean response on their behalf, beginning with their usual penchant for turning the tables of their rivals. "So do you prefer Socrates, who had no friends? Whose relations with others were based on dissimulation and a desire for power and mastery over others by intellectual humiliation and a histrionic air of self-righteous moral superiority? Of course, the hope is that after one achieves a double first, one might grow out of these traits, but in Socrates's case, this never happened. His pupil Plato, moreover, merely carried over in spades these unattractive vices into his writing, with tiresome games of authorial dissimulation, the primary aim of which seems to be to underwrite a similar Socratic pose of untouchable superiority and knowledge. But neither the master in life, nor the pupil hiding behind his texts, ever made the slightest nod to straightforward reciprocity, to an honest entrusting of mutual emotions and respect, or to anything that might qualify as human friendship. And unfortunately, they founded a metaphysically damaging tradition of looking right through fellow living individuals in a vain attempt to grasp at rather chilly, inhuman abstractions. Indeed, it remains a great mystery in the light of his fervent espousal of abstraction how Plato justifies a rather perverse obsession with one person for all of his adult life; clearly, he must have been in the psychologically twisted grips of some species of attachment disorder.

"Next we have their poor metic student, Aristotle, whose friendship fantasy is a group of wealthy gentlemen sitting around in, say, White's (so aptly named!) and exchanging war stories and stock tips. Of course, a few of the most competitive members might try to suss out exactly where they stand in each other's estimation so they can get a better sense of their overall ranking in the club hierarchy, but only a poor chap peering from the outside could envy membership within these cramped halls of smug and

blinkered privilege. As for Stoics, much like Socrates they view others merely as an excuse for displaying their virtue. Unlike him, however, they might actually do something for you, but at the end of the day, you might prefer that they hadn't because of their insufferable moral self-satisfaction and sense of superiority. And as they say, their only real friend is the perfect sage, whom they have never met and are unlikely to ever meet. But if he were to move his finger prudently, that is more important to them than your offer of an arm and a leg, or, indeed, your life. As for the Cyrenaics, who are always being confused with us, didn't they think a friend, like a body part, is useful only so long as it is there? Good luck with that unless your goal is loneliness."

At the very least, when one compares Epicurus's account to his ancient philosophical competitors it is not immediately clear that he stumbles more spectacularly, and in many ways he seems to be on much more promising ground. It is also perhaps worth remembering that though the Epicurean ideal is not heroic in the grand sense of Achilles or Antigone, Epicureans are also not likely to wreak the kind of carnage of their more heroic counterparts. Yes Pylades's and Orestes's friendship is memorable—memorable for killing Orestes's mom. By the same token, the tests of Epicurean friendship depend on circumstances and it is not at all clear that the sage will not give his life or make great sacrifices for a friend in a way that has touches of nobility. One can cavil and charge that Epicureans, because they value so little, give up little, including when giving up their lives, so that somehow Epicurean sacrifices inevitably lack grandeur. Yet, Epicurus's view often seems to capture more of what one might want in a friendship: reciprocity without any metaphysical rigamarole; someone who will remember you fondly without a lot of drama attached to your loss; someone to share intellectual and more ordinary pleasures without the psychic burdens of hidden competition and the smothering demands of status. It may, of course, be that as Cicero and others have charged, the Epicureans' overall theory ultimately cannot justify their vision and practice of friendship. But a century of battles between consequentialists and Kantians has not done any better and the few renegade theorists who have tried to carve out a separate space for friendship<sup>64</sup> have not been particularly successful in getting either side to modify their ethical and meta-ethical arguments accordingly. Questions about intimate relations such as friendship have never rested very easily within the confines and demands

of larger ethical theories and, in this, Epicurus's account is no exception. Some scholars have seen signs that he did in fact try to shoehorn his conception of friendship into his larger hedonic theory. If this is indeed the case, it is not clear that this ultimately redounds to his philosophical credit. But there are also signs that both he and his followers went forward with the kind of attitude we see elsewhere in his philosophy. For instance, he thinks he has good evidence for atoms, but also good evidence for thinking that the phenomenal world is not just an illusion. How these two features of our world are compatible and how one avoids scepticism about either in the light of their seemingly contradictory demands is hard to work out. But they seem to be related and both justified by the best available evidence, so an enviable willingness to follow out both features of the world leads Epicurus into the more difficult position of giving up neither, even if he cannot explain their exact relation. Sort of like pleasure and friendship, I think. Epicurus may not be precisely sure how all the parts are related, but that doesn't mean that he gives up either his commitments to pleasure or to friendship or that he recommends treating a friend like a body part that is useful only so long as it is there. Perhaps recognizing his admirable honesty in this case and its difficulties can be more revealing than misplaced charity.

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<sup>1</sup> Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction*, 127–39 along with his amended discussion, "Epicurus on Friendship," 121–29.

<sup>2</sup> For possible resonances with the language of mystery cult, David Armstrong, "Epicurean Virtues, Epicurean Friendship: Cicero vs. the Herculaneum Papyri," 105–106.

<sup>3</sup> Long and Sedley (*The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:144), however, reject Usener's *πρός <τῷ>* and the notion of mutual study.

<sup>4</sup> The reading is in doubt, though most accept that there is an equivalence made between the pain that the sage feels and what his friend feels.

<sup>5</sup> Many scholars interpret *ἀσφάλειαν φιλίας* as "the security provided by friendship," no doubt because of the prominence of *ἀσφάλεια* in connection with justice and the security it provides from others. (Cf. Torquatus's paraphrase at *Fin.* 68–69: *amicitiae praesidium esse firmissimum*.) However, it is not clear whether *φιλίας* functions as an objective or subjective genitive and Epicurus might just as well be pointing to the sureness or reliability of friendship itself.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, "Epicurus on the Value of Friendship (*Sententia Vaticana XXIII*)," 68–80.

<sup>7</sup> Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World*, 53 ff.; Wolffe, *L'Être, l'homme, le disciple. Figures philosophiques empruntées aux Anciens*, 172 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Mitsis, "Epicurus on Friendship and Altruism," 126–53; Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*.

<sup>9</sup> Festugière, *Epicurus and His Gods*, 46; Piergiacomini, *Storia delle teologie atomiste: da Democrito a Diogeniano*.

<sup>10</sup> O'Connor, "The Invulnerable Pleasures of Epicurean Friendship," 165–86; Dimas, "Epicurus on Pleasure, Desire, and Friendship," 164–82.

<sup>11</sup> Brown, "Epicurus on the Value of Friendship"; Evans, "Can Epicureans Be Friends?," 423; Rossi, "Squaring the Epicurean Circle: Happiness and Friendship in the Garden."

<sup>12</sup> Torquatus, the Epicurean spokesman in *De finibus*, compares Epicurus's friendships to those of the great mythical friendships in the past at 1.65. Some scholars view this as a bit of irony on Cicero's part.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World*, who articulates this distinction especially well. See as well Roskam, *Λάθ' ἐβίωσα*: *On the Vicissitudes of an Epicurean Doctrine*.

<sup>14</sup> See the discussion of Voula Tsounain this volume.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Epictetus, *Diss.* 2.20. In direct opposition to the Stoic view that there is a natural bond between parents and children and that this is the origin of our developing sociability, at *DRN* 5.116–17, Lucretius claims that children had to break down their parents' uncivil temperament (*ingenium superbum*) with caresses (*blanditiis*) in order for family units to begin to come together. It might be that Lucretius is innovating here, but there are no suggestions of natural sociability in what we have of Epicurus's own texts.

<sup>16</sup> O’Keefe, “Is Epicurean Friendship Altruistic?,” 269–305.

<sup>17</sup> O’Keefe, “Is Epicurean Friendship Altruistic?,” 276.

<sup>18</sup> O’Connor, “The Invulnerable Pleasures of Epicurean Friendship,” 174.

<sup>19</sup> O’Connor, “The Invulnerable Pleasures of Epicurean Friendship,” 170. This analogy rather deflates the ritual/sacrificial valences of these communal feasts in the Greek context.

<sup>20</sup> O’Connor, “The Invulnerable Pleasures of Epicurean Friendship,” 171.

<sup>21</sup> O’Connor, “The Invulnerable Pleasures of Epicurean Friendship,” 172.

<sup>22</sup> O’Connor, “The Invulnerable Pleasures of Epicurean Friendship,” 167.

<sup>23</sup> A well-known paper by Diskin Clay (“Individual and Community in the First Generation of the Epicurean School”) is often cited in support of these practices, but, of course, Clay’s whole point was, given the school’s communal face and its ongoing identification with Epicurus, how difficult it is to chronologically locate particular doctrinal formulations and practices.

<sup>24</sup> O’Connor, “The Invulnerable Pleasures of Epicurean Friendship,” 174. I say “invokes” here, because he does not do this explicitly, though his arguments are in line with these claims.

<sup>25</sup> Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World*.

<sup>26</sup> Evans’s argument (“Can Epicureans Be Friends?,” 408) for the claim that non-instrumental friends would be too much of an hedonic liability is rather curt. William Baird’s thought experiment and conclusion about how Epicureans in Valuationville will achieve *ataraxia* more readily than those in Selfopolis offers a more plausible alternative. Baird, “Friends with Benefits: Other Regard in Epicurean Ethics,” 30 ff.

<sup>27</sup> For a more nuanced account, Barigazzi, “Sul concetto epicuro della sicurezze esterna,” 73–92.

<sup>28</sup> The relation of friendship to justice, especially in later sources, is a complicated one that is taken up below (260). Cicero’s account in *Fin.* hints at the relation of friendship and security, but since Evans dismisses Cicero’s evidence I will deal with it in the section on Cicero below (263). O’Keefe argues (p. 277) that *KD* 40 is about the security that friendship offers, but the argument is rather that once one has achieved security from one’s neighbors (presumably through contracts of justice), one can then enjoy the fruits of friendship. It is not that friendship itself secures protection from neighbors.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Graver (in this volume, 495). Seneca’s views about friendship and his use of Epicurean friendship as a foil have been much studied—e.g., Brinckman, “Der Begriff der Freundschaft in Senecas Briefen”; Gagliardi, *Un legame per vivere: (sul concetto di amicitia nelle lettere di Seneca)*—mostly with a negative view of Seneca’s reliability in reporting Epicurus’s views. A more positive account can be found in Schottlender, “Epikureisches bei Seneca. Ein Ringen um den Sinn von Freude und Freundschaft,” 133–48. The question of whether friendship has its origins in *inopia*, *indigentia*, *imbecillitas*, and so on (cf. *Laelius*, 26) and their relation to self-sufficiency is a standard question that Epicurus no doubt weighed in on. But questions about origins need to be distinguished from claims about the point or goal of friendship. Seneca nowhere in 9.8 mentions pleasure as a goal of Epicurean friendships, for instance, and we have no corroborating evidence that Epicurus claimed that the point or aim of friendship was, for instance, to have someone who could perform sick visits.

<sup>30</sup> That is, the claim that visiting prisoners and the sick count as central cases of *asphaleia*; rather, they seem commonplace instances of *inopia*, *imbecillitas*, and so on, as in the *Laelius*.

<sup>31</sup> Eric Brown, following Evans, concludes “... the most important benefit a friend provides is the confidence that he will help” in “Politics and Society,” 182, turning what is clearly a general, comparative claim in *SV* 34 into a particular, absolute one.

<sup>32</sup> Evans, “Can Epicureans Be Friends?,” 419.



<sup>33</sup> Evans, “Can Epicureans Be Friends?,” 420. Rossi, “Squaring the Epicurean Circle” argues convincingly that many of these strategies for egoistic trust formulated by Evans are, in any case, ultimately self-defeating.

<sup>34</sup> See the discussion of Roskam in this volume.

<sup>35</sup> Goldschmidt, *La Doctrine d’Epicure et la droit*.

<sup>36</sup> This has been encouraged in the English-speaking world (and more recently in the French, 2001) by Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.125–39. They include evidence about friendship under the section on “Society.”

<sup>37</sup> Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World*, 109 ff. Cf. also Konstan, *A Life Worthy of the Gods: The Materialist Psychology of Epicurus*, 91–92.

<sup>38</sup> Gigandet, “Épicure, la *philia* et les *philoï*: un réexamen,” 89–106.

<sup>39</sup> Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World*, 109 ff. Cf. also Konstan, *A Life Worthy of the Gods: The Materialist Psychology of Epicurus*, 91–92.

<sup>40</sup> For many acute observations about Cicero’s methods of rhetorical argument and the nature of his arguments against Epicurean hedonism, see Inwood, “*Rhetorica Disputatio*: The Strategy of *de Finibus* II.” For Cicero’s attitudes to Epicureanism generally, see Carlos Levy in this volume.

<sup>41</sup> The most recent comprehensive discussion is Frede, “Epicurus on the Importance of Friendship in the Good Life (*De Finibus* 1.65–70; 2.78–85).”

<sup>42</sup> *Fin.* 1.65 *amoris conspiratione consentientes*; 1.67 *amicos et nosmet ipsos diligamus*; 1.69 *tamen ipsi amici propter se ipsos amentur*, etc.

<sup>43</sup> For the general problem of the relation of aretaic and contractual justice, see Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability*, ch. 3. For detailed discussion of contractual justice see Paganini in this volume.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Mitsis and Piergiacomì, “Epicurei e Cirenaici a confronto,” 109–13.

<sup>45</sup> See Eric Brown for an extremely careful examination of the evidence in “Epicurus on Friendship (*Sententia Vaticana* 23),” 68–80. Also now, H. Essler, “Die Lust der Freundschaft und die Lust des Freundes von Epikur bis Cicero.”

<sup>46</sup> Frede, “Epicurus on the Importance of Friendship in the Good Life (*De Finibus* 1.65–70; 2.78–85),” 106. See as well Stern-Gillet, “Epicurus and Friendship” for defense of the claim that a desire for *ataraxia* necessarily leads to mutual bonds of trust and self-sacrifice.

<sup>47</sup> Frede, “Epicurus on the Importance of Friendship in the Good Life (*De Finibus* 1.65–70; 2.78–85),” 106.

<sup>48</sup> In a stimulating and far-ranging discussion Julia Annas explores the possibility of such a two-level theory to explain the evidence. She argues that Epicurus needs such a theory, but does not produce it. O’Keefe argues that Epicurus does in fact produce it. Cf. Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 240 ff.; and O’Keefe, “Is Epicurean Friendship Altruistic?”

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, E. Mason, “Can an Indirect Consequentialist Be a Real Friend?”

<sup>50</sup> O’Keefe, “Is Epicurean Friendship Altruistic?,” 294.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. the discussion of Nemeth, *Epicurus on the Self*.

<sup>52</sup> O’Keefe tries to bolster his account by making an analogy to the Stoics’ distinction between the goal and the target of their moral craft. The Stoics, however, are appealing to a craft with an *internal* goal, i.e. I fulfill the moral craft when I properly aim at preferred indifferents, independently of whether I successfully hit the target or not. The Stoics are keen to show how external results are not part of the goal of their moral craft. In contrast, the Epicurean, by merely aiming at his friend’s pleasure correctly, is not thereby fulfilling his goal, which remains separate and external from the process itself of aiming.

<sup>53</sup> Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 241 ff.



<sup>54</sup> Voula Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, 276.

<sup>55</sup> Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, esp. pp. 27–31. Cf. Nathan Gilbert, “Among Friends: Cicero and the Epicureans.”

<sup>56</sup> David Armstrong seems to agree with Tsouna about the correspondences between Philodemus’s views and Cicero’s second account, but is far more sanguine about the use of Philodemus in reconstructing Epicurus’s original view. “Utility and Affection in Epicurean Friendship: Philodemus *On the Gods* 3, *On Property Management*, and Horace, *Sermones* 2.6,” 182–208.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. the discussion of Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, 31.

<sup>58</sup> On this general tendency in Epicureanism, see the stimulating paper of Erler, “Epicurus as *deus mortalis*: *homoiosis theoi* and Epicurean Self-cultivation.”

<sup>59</sup> Essler, “Freundschaft Der Gotter und Toten mit Einer Neuedition von Phld., *DI* iii, Frg. 87 und 83.”

<sup>60</sup> Essler, “Freundschaft Der Gotter.”

<sup>61</sup> Armstrong, “Epicurean Virtues, Epicurean Friendship” and “Utility and Affection in Epicurean Friendship.” I wish to thank David Armstrong for personal clarifications of his argument. There are some puzzles here, of course. Is a dead friend really a friend in any robust sense? Aren’t these relations purely of memory and asymmetrical, rather than the kinds of mutual relations enjoyed by gods? Etc.

<sup>62</sup> *De elect.* 14.1–14. Indelli and Tsouna McKirahan, [*Philodemus*] [*On Choices and Avoidances*].

<sup>63</sup> Frede, “Epicurus on the Importance of Friendship in the Good Life,” 113–17.

<sup>64</sup> See, for instance, Stocker for the so-called “friendship critique” of consequentialist and deontological theories, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories”.

## CHAPTER 11

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# POLITICS AND SOCIETY

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GEERT ROSKAM

EPICURUS was a tree trunk. This, at least, is the suggestion of Plutarch of Chaeronea, when he attacks in one of his treatises overly rigid people who keep to an excessively disciplined way of life. In his view, such immutability is only fitting for men who have chosen a leisurely and solitary life in the shade,<sup>1</sup> devoid of friends and honor (*Advice about Keeping Well* 135B), and obviously Epicurus and his followers, “who ran away from every activity that involved ambition (*φιλοτιμία*)” (135C–D), are prominent members of this group. It is well known indeed that Epicurus generally recommended the avoidance of public life with all the misery it entails. As a rule, the pleasant and happy life is to be found in a sequestered life among friends, rather than in the disordered turmoil of politics, and Epicurus’s famous advice to “live unnoticed” (*λάθῃ βιώσας*; Usener 551) is one of the most lapidary expressions of this ideal. Now Plutarch’s sharp reaction against Epicurus’s supposed anti-political position is only one of many similar attacks in his voluminous œuvre.<sup>2</sup> His anti-Epicurean polemics are a precious source of information, to be sure, and they contain many arguments that are quite intelligent, although most of them are also unfair and rather unconvincing. In any case, he plants more than one

poisonous spine in Epicurus's cherished flesh. In short, if Epicurus was a tree trunk, Plutarch himself was a cactus.

And yet, even if nearly all of his spiny arguments would in the end fail to convince Epicurus, it is often unwise to simply ignore or despise them. Polemists like Plutarch often raise interesting questions that repay closer attention. In this case, Plutarch's great indignation, however unjustified it may have been, may well recall how controversial Epicurus's position actually was. It is safe to say that the great majority of the well-educated people in antiquity would side with Plutarch. Aristotle no doubt expressed the *communis opinio* of the intellectual upper class with his statement that a man can only realize himself and reach happiness in the political community of the *polis* (cf. *Pol.* 1.1253a29–39). Both Plato and Zeno, and their respective followers, would basically agree (each of them, of course, laying his own accents), and outside the philosophical schools, the members of the aristocratic families would usually adopt the same view.<sup>3</sup> It may well be that many of them even endorsed the much more radical view of Calicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, who regarded philosophy as a youthful pastime that has to be abandoned for a more serious, public career (*Grg.* 484c4–486d1).<sup>4</sup>

However that may be, Epicurus radically opposed the widespread enthusiasm for a brilliant political or military career. In his view, the unnoticed life far away from the crowd guarantees much more secure pleasure. The young, uncultivated Pythocles is more successful than Themistocles, the victor of the Persians, the slave Mys is happier than Alexander the Great, and the hetaera Hedeia is more blessed than Queen Gorgo of Sparta, the wife of Leonidas. This is quite a remarkable view, and far from self-evident indeed. One begins to see why a public-minded Platonist like Plutarch suggestively associates Epicurus with a tree trunk. But was Plutarch right?

## THE BASICS

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### 1. The follies of a political career

Epicurus's philosophical view is in its essence quite simple. Every individual should pursue pleasure as his final end and should take care to

refer all his actions to this ultimate standard (*KD* 25). Even brief observation and reflection soon shows that a political career usually harms rather than contributes to one's pleasure. It is far easier and safer to enjoy simple pleasures in the company of like-minded friends than emulate Achilles in a vain attempt to "always be the best"<sup>5</sup> in order to reach an ephemeral fame. Epicurus's view on politics is in that sense merely the simple and consistent, though radical, conclusion of his principal choice for pleasure as the *summum bonum*.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that a political career is almost casually abandoned for an unreflected *carpe diem*. Epicurus explained his view with elaborate philosophical arguments. Especially important in this context is his famous distinction between three kinds of desires: those that are (1) natural and necessary, (2) natural though not necessary, and (3) neither natural nor necessary (*KD* 29; *SV* 20; *Ep. Men.* 127). Only those of the first kind (e.g. the desire for food and drink) are absolutely indispensable, and fortunately, these desires are also very easy to satisfy. A moderate amount of food suffices to silence the voice of the flesh (cf. *SV* 33). The second kind of desire (e.g. for more sophisticated food) can be pursued in certain circumstances, to be sure, but only if they do not entail any harm (*SV* 21: ἄν μὴ βλάπτωσι).<sup>6</sup> In any case, a man's happiness is not diminished if this second kind of desire remains unsatisfied. The main problem lies with the third category of desires. These are absolutely to be avoided. Under this category fall, for instance, the pursuit of power and influence, or the thirst for glory and honor and its material expression (crowns, statues, inscriptions, etc.). Many of these desires are directly or indirectly related to political life. They are by definition limitless<sup>7</sup> and moreover easily entail competition and rivalry, which reduces the political arena to a battlefield of all kinds of passions. Hatred, envy, and contempt are the order of the day, and these in turn directly entail harm from other people (βλάβαι ἐξ ἀνθρώπων).<sup>8</sup> In Epicurus's view, other people are indeed a possible source of damage, and an important part of his thinking that will be discussed in the next pages precisely aims at avoiding or neutralizing this harm. Engagement in politics is definitely not the best means to that end, since it generally harms and even ruins blessedness (*Plut. Pyrrh.* 20.3 = *Usener* 552), interferes with true friendship,<sup>9</sup> and entails great difficulties and dangers.<sup>10</sup>

While the politician has to face all these troubles, he simply forgets to enjoy the pleasures of life. His whole life passes while he is occupied and he dies while he is still busy with all kind of public duties.<sup>11</sup> Particularly interesting in this context is a scene from the life of King Pyrrhus. When Pyrrhus was preparing a military campaign against Italy, his collaborator and friend Cineas asked what the king would do if he should be able to conquer the Romans. Pyrrhus replied that at that moment, he should get control of the whole of Italy. Sicily would soon follow, and then Libya and Carthage, so that in the end Pyrrhus would triumph over all his enemies (Plut. *Pyrrh.* 14.4–11). Cineas insisted (14.11–13):

“γενομένων δὲ πάντων ὑφ’ ἡμῖν, τί ποιήσομεν;” καὶ ὁ Πύρρος ἐπιγελάσας, “συχολήν” ἔφη “ἄξομεν πολλήν, καὶ κώθων ὧ μακάριε καθημερινὸς ἔσται, καὶ διὰ λόγων συνόντες ἀλλήλους εὐφρανοῦμεν.” ἔνταῦθα δὴ τῶν λόγων καταστήσας τὸν Πύρρον ὁ Κινέας, “εἴτα” ἔφη “τί νῦν ἐμποδὼν ἔστιν ἡμῖν βουλομένοις κώθωνι χρῆσθαι καὶ σχολάζειν μετ’ ἀλλήλων, εἰ ταῦτ’ ἔχομεν ἤδη καὶ πάρεστιν ἀπραγμόνως, ἔφ’ ἃ δι’ αἵματος καὶ πόνων μεγάλων καὶ κινδύνων μέλλομεν ἀφίξεσθαι, πολλὰ καὶ δράσαντες ἑτέρους κακὰ καὶ παθόντες;”

“But when we have got everything subject to us, what are we going to do?” Then Pyrrhus smiled upon him and said: “We shall be much at ease, and we’ll drink bumpers, my good man, every day, and we’ll gladden one another’s hearts with confidential talks.” And now that Cineas had brought Pyrrhus to this point in the argument, he said: “Then what stands in our way now if we want to drink bumpers and while away the time with one another? Surely this privilege is ours already, and we have at hand, without taking any trouble, those things to which we hope to attain by bloodshed and great toils and perils, after doing much harm to others and suffering much ourselves.”<sup>12</sup>

This story is a telling illustration of the unlimited process of ever-increasing desires. A series of new challenges should in the end culminate in the ultimate pleasure, somewhere in the distant future. But this final pleasure is again and again postponed, although it is within reach from the very beginning. This perverse dynamic is laid bare by Cineas’s rational intervention. Although Cineas was probably not an Epicurean,<sup>13</sup> his down-to-earth reaction is perfectly in line with the Epicurean perspective and actually shows the power of Epicurus’s alternative. Even Plutarch shows no trace of disapproval here. At the same time, however, the story also illustrates the great difficulties which Epicurus and his followers encountered in persuading politicians. Plutarch goes on to say that Cineas’s words troubled Pyrrhus more than they converted him (14.14: *ἡνίασε μᾶλλον ἢ μετέθηκε*). Pyrrhus gained insight into his situation, to be sure,

but nonetheless persisted and in the end perished without ever having reached his great ambitions or enjoyed his simple, easily attainable pleasures.

Pyrrhus was certainly not the only one who was victim of this pernicious spiral. As mentioned above, the great majority of Epicurus's aristocratic contemporaries in all likelihood heard at their own level a similar Siren song, and once they had given their ears to it and ended up in the surging waves of the stormy sea of politics, it was often difficult for them to withdraw. This throws penetrating light on the relevance of SV 58, where politics is called a prison (*δεσμωτήριο*). This is a particularly striking imagery with great rhetorical power. The ambitious and famous politician is not a man who is able to do whatever he likes, being master of the situation, but a mere prisoner, the slave of both his own immoderate desires and the crowd (cf. SV 67). This is quite an eye-opening perspective, to say the least.

Such salient images can thus contribute a great deal to a man's insight into his own miserable condition. Sometimes they may even be the starting point of a more substantial process of recovery.<sup>14</sup> Epicurus indeed more than once explicitly presents his philosophy as a therapy of the sick soul. He provides an elaborate cure of erroneous convictions and empty, unnatural desires which interfere with a man's happiness.<sup>15</sup> In the context of this *Seelenheilung*, he frequently adopts a radical, even offensive point of view. The above characterization of politics as a prison is only one of the many examples of such straightforward frankness (*παρρησία*). Idle, empty phrases are mercilessly unmasked. The concept of *τὸ καλόν*, for instance, which was traditionally used in order to express the "honorable" ideal of politics (see, e.g., Arist. *EE* 1.1216a23–27 or X. *Mem.* 3.6.2), is for Epicurus as such merely an empty term (Usener 511 = Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 5.73; 5.119 etc.).<sup>16</sup> He refuses to deem it the key notion of the ideal of the public interest, which is after all rather vague. Philodemus would later frankly state that it is better to care for oneself than for the ordinary multitude (*Rhet.*, *P.Herc.* 1078/1080 fr. 17.3–8; Sudhaus II.157). Epicurus himself is even more provocative: he simply spits upon what is honorable (*προσπύω τῷ καλῷ*) and on those who vainly admire it, whenever it does not bring any pleasure (Ath. 12.547a = Usener 512). This may sound like a shocking statement—and that is probably at least part of Epicurus's own intention—but it is not the expression of an anarchist agitator. Rather, it is a

strong, thought-provoking appeal not to fall for empty words but rather look to the actual facts (*εἰς τὰ πράγματα βλέπειν*; *KD* 37).

This sober-minded look at the “facts” (*πράγματα*) is, in my view, one of the most attractive strengths of Epicurus’s philosophy. It is telling that an experienced statesman such as Cicero, who cannot be expected to show much sympathy or positive bias for Epicurus, is occasionally prepared to admit that in the political situation of his day, Epicurus’s advice to retire from public life may well be wise.<sup>17</sup> It is no less telling that Philodemus can confidently—and correctly—claim history as an argument for his own position (*Rhet.*, *P.Herc.* 1506 col. 6.28–30; Sudhaus II.209), and his observation that politicians are often slaughtered like cattle, even for trivial reasons (*Rhet.*, *P.Herc.* 1669 col. 5.6–15; Sudhaus I.234–5), may have been a rhetorical hyperbole, to be sure, but it was in all likelihood closer to real life than a somewhat naive or highly idealized appreciation of politics. Epicurus’s statements may have been offensive and provocative, no doubt, but his radical frankness never lost touch with concrete reality.

The same holds true for Epicurus’s evaluation of famous politicians. Often he does not shrink from ridiculing them in fairly coarse terms.<sup>18</sup> A case in point is Epameinondas, whom he calls “iron guts” and whose famous accomplishments he ridicules and belittles.<sup>19</sup> This polemical laughter<sup>20</sup> has more than one important function. First of all, it strongly diminishes the potentially seductive character of the example of these famous statesmen: they should not be imitated at all, since they were actually utter fools who were unable to make the right choices and enjoy the pleasures of the present moment. And Lucretius argues that their most fundamental motivation was a silly, unjustified fear of death.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, this criticism of renowned politicians illustrates once again Epicurus’s striking sober-mindedness and sense of reality, in that he demystifies, as it were, the great past and reduces its protagonists to their normal proportions. Finally, his polemic also confirms the value of his own alternative and underlines his own independence. According to Metrodorus, this polemical laughter is that of a truly free man (Plutarch *Against Colotes* 1127C = fr. 32 K).

Many of the above-mentioned topics are crystallized in one of the most notorious fragments from the same Metrodorus:<sup>22</sup>



οὐδὲν δεῖ σῶζειν τοὺς Ἕλληνας οὐδ' ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ στεφάνων παρ' αὐτῶν τυγχάνειν, ἀλλ' ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν οἶνον, ὧς Τιμόκρατες, ἀβλαβῶς τῇ γαστρὶ καὶ κεχαρισμένως.

There is no need to save the Greeks or to receive crowns from them for wisdom, but merely to eat and drink wine, Timocrates, and gratify the belly without harming it.

What immediately strikes the eye in this fragment is its unequivocal clarity. Two basic alternatives are diametrically opposed to each other. Great “honorable” ideals are here made concrete in the salvation of Greece, and simply rejected and replaced by a much more feasible and far less dangerous alternative, viz. moderate eating and drinking. Be your own ordinary self rather than Themistocles! This presents the very core of Epicurus’s message in all its radicalness. It is difficult to be sure about the original context of this fragment,<sup>23</sup> but my suggestion is that Metrodorus’s words did not belong to a polemical attack against his brother<sup>24</sup> but should rather be understood in a pedagogical context of *Seelenheilung* and as such illustrate the frankness for which Metrodorus was so renowned in Epicurean circles (cf. Philodemus *On Frank Criticism* fr. 15.6–10 and col. 5b.1–6). This would imply that the emphasis is rather on constructive self-affirmation than on offensive or abusive rebuke.

## 2. The blessings of the Epicurean life

If that is true, this fragment is a welcome transition to our discussion of the second pole of Epicurus’s *Seelenheilung*. For indeed, the above analysis tells only one half of the story. Epicurus’s therapy was based on two complementary poles: sharp ἔλεγχος (SV 21) and constructive admonition (*νουθέτησις*; fr. [34].22.3–4; [34].25.22–3 and 30; [34].27.2–3 and 10–11 Arr.<sup>2</sup>). This more constructive approach was probably in the first place adopted in the more confined circle of friends, sympathizers, or potential adherents, if possible in a face-to-face conversation (cf. Diogenes of Oenoanda, fr. 3.III.13–14) or through personal letters. In such a context, sharp provocative language often has to yield to a milder tone and sound advice. Thus, in a letter to Idomeneus, Epicurus recommends his friend to abandon political life (Sen. *Ep.* 22.5–6 = Usener 133). What is remarkable, however, is that he does not elaborate at length on the usual refrain of all the miseries and dangers which a political career entails. This refrain is obviously the justification of Epicurus’s advice, as Idomeneus no doubt knew very well, but the full emphasis is here apparently on the demand to

adapt one's attitude to the specific circumstances. Idomeneus should not leave politics in a hurry and without consideration, but in a well-reflected way, taking into account the right opportunity and deciding himself on the most appropriate course to follow (*apte . . . tempestiveque*). The fragment thus provides an interesting illustration of Epicurus's common sense and of his sincere respect for the freedom and personal judgment of Idomeneus. If Epicurus had been a doctor, he would have never simply forced his patient to drink the bitter medicine. He would quietly hand him the cup, explain why the medicine is useful, and further await the initiative of the patient himself.

Sometimes he was even willing to coat the lip of the cup with honey, as Lucretius would do later (*DRN* 1.936–42). We see this in another fragment from probably the same letter to Idomeneus (*Sen. Ep.* 21.3 = Usener 132):

*Si gloria tangeris, notiores te epistulae meae facient quam omnia ista, quae colis et propter quae coleris.*

If you are attracted by fame, my letters will make you more renowned than all the things which you cherish and which make you cherished.<sup>25</sup>

This is a beautiful sample of psychological insight, which moreover demonstrates that Epicurus not only takes into account the particular situation of his correspondent but his or her character and shortcomings as well. Instead of sharply castigating Idomeneus's empty desire of honor, he subtly reorients it towards a more salutary perspective: a turn towards the Epicurean way of life will not merely guarantee happiness but even secure his reputation (which, by the way, also proved correct in this particular case, since Idomeneus is better known for his connections with Epicurus than for his political achievements in Lampsacus). Early Epicurean literature contains more traces of this technique. Epicurus himself suggests that everybody can pursue a crown of *ἀταραξία* (Plutarch *Against Colotes* 1125C = Usener 556),<sup>26</sup> and Metrodorus promises every future Epicurean a great reputation (*Sen. Ep.* 79.16 = Körte fr. 43). In all of these cases, basically the same strategy is at work: the actual existence of the unnecessary and unnatural desire for honor is not ignored but accepted as the point of departure, after which it is argued that this desire may equally well, if not better, be satisfied in an Epicurean perspective, because

Epicurus generously grants long-lasting fame to his friends and followers. A true helper indeed!

This individual approach is further supported by an enthusiastic description of the Epicurean ideal. The pure happiness of the Epicurean life is depicted in the most positive terms. The Epicurean lives “like a god among men” (*Ep. Men.* 135), enjoys the fullest intimacy in a company of friends, and his happiness is ultimately not even troubled by the death of a friend (*KD* 40). He quietly looks down from his *templa serena* on the confused life of other people (*Lucr. DRN* 2.7–13). The paradigm par excellence is, of course, Epicurus himself, who enjoyed, together with Metrodorus and many others, the pleasures of a perfectly tranquil life without being concerned about a possible lack of political honor and fame (*Sen. Ep.* 79.15 = Usener 188 and Metrodorus, Körte test. 23). It is clear that such positive examples have a particularly strong protreptic power, and moreover they also prove the feasibility of Epicurus’s ideal.

Among the many blessings of the ideal Epicurean life is also that of relative independence. Self-sufficiency based on a simple way of life is highly esteemed in the Garden<sup>27</sup> and contrasts sharply with servility to mobs or kings (*SV* 67). No less important is the Epicurean’s security (*ἀσφάλεια*), a notion that is of paramount importance in Epicurus’s social and political thinking.<sup>28</sup> Personal security is an indispensable *conditio sine qua non* for a pleasant life. I shall return to this crucial topic in due course. Here it suffices to note that this precious security is much easier to find in Epicurus’s Garden than in political life and that some of its most essential ingredients<sup>29</sup> are a sequestered life, a good contact with one’s neighbors,<sup>30</sup> and, of course, friendship.

It is well known indeed that friendship occupies an extremely important place in Epicurus’s thinking. He explicitly juxtaposes friendship to wisdom (*SV* 78) and sings its praises in almost mystic terms (*SV* 52).<sup>31</sup> This is not the place to deal in detail with the theoretical problem to what extent Epicurus is able to love his friend for the latter’s own sake. If every friendship really takes its starting point in its usefulness, as Epicurus indeed believes (*SV* 23; cf. *DL* 10.120b = Usener 540), it is difficult to see how one could still do justice to the friend’s alterity. This issue is much discussed, from antiquity to the present day,<sup>32</sup> but it need not detain us here because it is primarily a theoretical problem (which, of course, does *not* mean that it is

a trivial question). There is little doubt that in practice Epicurus had no difficulty in finding like-minded friends—according to Diogenes Laertius (10.9), he could even count his friends by whole cities (cf. also Cic. *Fin.* 1.65)—and this is what primarily matters here.

Friendship is so important for Epicurus because it provides him with the necessary security. It is not so much the friend's actual assistance as the confidence that this help will come whenever he will need it that lays the foundation of the Epicurean's faith in the future (SV 34; cf. also SV 39; *KD* 27, 28, and 40). That explains why a friend's disloyalty is so dreadful, and that is also one of the main reasons why Timocrates's quarrel with Metrodorus, and his decision to leave the Garden and begin a base slander campaign against the Epicurean community,<sup>33</sup> found so much response in Epicurean circles: it really hit Epicurus in the heart. It is important to add, though, that the great value of friendship does not rest on mutual material support alone. Epicurean friendship also implies *συμφιλοσοφεῖν*, living together in the *contubernium* of the school,<sup>34</sup> improving and encouraging one another. It implies, in short, *δι' ἀλλήλων σώζεσθαι*, "being saved through one another" (Philodemus *On Frank Criticism* fr. 36.1–2).

Epicurus's philosophy thus combined a sharp attack against vain and conceited opinions and a fairly systematic exposure of unreflected traditional ideals with a sincere concern for friends and a great enthusiasm for all the advantages of the Epicurean way of life. Tight philosophical argumentation is combined with sober sense of reality, sharp criticism and frankness with mildness and laughter. In any case, Epicurus was not a dead tree trunk. The strong roots of his doctrines full of vital sap guaranteed a healthy growth in the well-cultivated environment of his Garden.

## TOWARDS A MORE NUANCED PERSPECTIVE

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The core of Epicurus's ideal is thus, as shown above, the rational pursuit of the intense and well-considered enjoyment of a simple life in the company of friends and in the security provided by the Garden, far away from the dangerous troubles of political life. This attractive tree—to maintain this image for a while—did not grow *in vacuo* but was firmly rooted in a garden that was to a certain extent part of the *polis* and needed the *polis* for its

survival.<sup>35</sup> Epicurus neither retired into the uninhabited wilderness (thus Plut. *Against Colotes* 1115A), nor placed his followers outside his native land (thus Sen. *Ep.* 90.35),<sup>36</sup> nor fled away into an idyllic dream world. After all, the κῆπος never became a παράδεισος.

Various indications suggest that Epicurus carefully took into account the surrounding society. We already saw that he gave much attention to harmonious contacts with neighbors. Other sources repeatedly confirm that Epicurus did not completely retire from his society and take refuge in an ivory tower. His κῆπος was no hanging garden either. The Epicurean sage did not ignore worldly business such as making money (DL 10.121b = Usener 567; cf. also 10.120a = Usener 572), administering his estate in a well-considered way (see on this esp. Philodemus, *On Property Management*), or acting as a judge (10.119 = Usener 576). What we know of Epicurus's own conduct points in the same direction. His testament shows that he was well aware of the existing legislation at Athens and knew how he could cleverly reconcile his own wish to leave the Garden to his successor Hermarchus with the law that did not allow bequeathing real property to non-citizens.<sup>37</sup> He frequently participated in festivals of the *polis* religion (although he no doubt understood the ceremonies differently from the multitude),<sup>38</sup> and as an outsider, he attentively followed the political developments of his day. He knew of the presence of Persaeus and Philonides at Antigonos's court<sup>39</sup> and stayed in close touch with several influential politicians such as Idomeneus, a minister with important powers at Lampsacus,<sup>40</sup> and Mithres, a minister of King Lysimachus.<sup>41</sup> One might object that he mainly advised these politicians to abandon their public career (cf. Cic. *Rep.* 1.3). In general, that may well be correct,<sup>42</sup> but at the same time, Epicurus did not hesitate to take advantage of their services whenever necessary and possible.<sup>43</sup> It has even been argued that the foundation of the school at Athens should at least partly be understood against the background of political events. Epicurus actually established himself at Athens shortly after the expulsion of Demetrius of Phaleron and the inauguration of the new government under Antigonos and his son Demetrius Poliorcetes.<sup>44</sup> It is rash to conclude from this observation that Epicurus was fully involved in political events and that his preference for a retired life is a mere myth or alibi.<sup>45</sup> In all likelihood, Epicurus never had

political ambitions, but he was intelligent enough not to ignore the political situation but to use it in the service of his own philosophical ideal.

In any case, he clearly acknowledged the importance of politics and probably also granted it its own autonomy.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, his advice to withdraw from participation in politics definitely did *not* imply a lack of respect for law and justice. The opposite is rather true. He strongly appreciated the existing body of law and the legislative work of the first legislators, because these guarantee the social stability and security he needed to enjoy his *ἀταραξία*. One of the most significant texts in this respect is a well-known fragment from Colotes of Lampsacus, one of Epicurus's good friends (Plut. *Against Colotes* 1124D):

τὸν βίον οἱ νόμους διατάξαντες καὶ νόμιμα καὶ τὸ βασιλεύεσθαι τὰς πόλεις καὶ ἄρχεσθαι καταστήσαντες εἰς πολλὴν ἀσφάλειαν καὶ ἡσυχίαν ἔθεντο καὶ θορύβων ἀπήλλαξαν· εἰ δέ τις ταῦτα ἀναιρήσει, θηρίων βίον βιωσόμεθα καὶ ὁ προστυχὼν τὸν ἐντυχόντα μονοноῦ κατέδεσται.

The men who appointed laws and usages and established the government of cities by kings and magistrates brought human life into a state of great security and peace and delivered it from turmoil. But if anyone takes all this away, we shall live a life of brutes, and anyone who chances upon another will all but devour him.<sup>47</sup>

These words express the core of the Epicurean view in a particularly concise and pregnant way and with a striking imagery. A well-ordered and harmonious society presupposes, in an early stage of the history of human civilization, the intervention of some gifted persons who had a good insight into both their own advantage and the common good and who persuaded the majority to refrain from harming one another. In that way, they were able to leave behind the bestial life, with all the dangerous struggles and conflicts it entails.

Basically the same perspective can be found in Hermarchus's account of the origin of the law on homicide and in Lucretius's famous genealogy in Book 5 of *DRN*. The great outlines of Epicurus's own view on law and justice are to be found at the end of the *Key Doctrines* (31–38). This is not the place to enter at length into all the subtleties of and problems connected with Epicurus's position.<sup>48</sup> Here it suffices to recall very briefly that Epicurus closely connects justice and usefulness. In his view, justice is not something that exists in its own right<sup>49</sup> but it always rests on a contract of mutual non-interference (*KD* 31 and 33) which is itself justified by its



usefulness (cf. *KD* 36). This understanding of justice has several important implications. Although the just is always and everywhere what is useful in a social context, the concrete interpretation of it can vary from place to place (*KD* 36). There is also room for reconsideration and revision, for laws that no longer contribute to social usefulness are by definition no longer just (*KD* 37 and 38). On the other hand, the fact that justice is based on a contract implies that there can be no justice towards animals or towards people who are not prepared, or unable, to make a contract (*KD* 32). Finally, breaking the contract is absolutely to be avoided, not because injustice is bad in itself but because a man can never be sure that he will escape detection and thus has to live in constant fear of punishment (*KD* 34 and 35).

This brief and fairly general survey may suffice to illustrate Epicurus's great respect for existing legislation. More than rival philosophical schools, Epicurus indeed took seriously the concrete law code. Whereas the Stoics called all existing laws bad,<sup>50</sup> Epicurus and his followers emphasized their great importance for the well-organized stability of the *polis*. This position places Epicurus's doctrine of *μὴ πολιτεύεσθαι* in a somewhat different perspective. His view cannot be reduced to doxographic black and white oppositions and generalizing simplifications. It is rather remarkable how multi-faceted and extremely nuanced his thinking really was. He had no difficulty juxtaposing the most sarcastic criticism of distinguished politicians with the most enthusiastic appreciation of traditional legislators and laws, and to combine his refusal to actively engage in politics with his great esteem for the security which the political system provides.<sup>51</sup>

This tension can be found throughout Epicurus's socio-political thinking. On the one hand, several fragments suggest a deep feeling of contempt for the great multitude and a distinct preference for the pleasant life among the small circle of the happy few.<sup>52</sup> In that sense, the effect which his words will have on the crowd are only of minor importance, as appears from *Vatican Saying* 29:

παρρησίᾳ γὰρ ἔγωγε χρώμενος φυσιολογῶν χρησμοδεῖν τὰ συμφέροντα πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις  
μᾶλλον ἢ βουλοίμην κἄν μηδεὶς μέλλῃ συνήσειν, ἢ συγκατατιθέμενος ταῖς δόξαις  
καρποῦσθαι τὸν πυκνὸν παραπίπτοντα παρὰ τῶν πολλῶν ἔπαινον.

Employing frankness in my study of natural philosophy, I would prefer to proclaim in oracular fashion what is beneficial to all men, even if no one is going to understand, rather



than to assent to [common] opinions and so enjoy the constant praise which comes from the many.<sup>53</sup>

Passages such like this one are beautiful testimonies to Epicurus's radical straightforwardness and intellectual courage. Epicurus always kept to his philosophical principles and was apparently not willing to abandon his insights for the sake of a "seeming" compromise. And many of his notoriously provocative statements<sup>54</sup> amply illustrate that the above fragment was no idle talk.

On the other hand, precisely these philosophical principles require from Epicurus due caution. For if the sage indeed wants to enjoy his pleasures in perfect tranquility, he does well not to provoke the crowd too much, since that would no doubt undermine his security. Epicurus's well-known advice to "live unnoticed" can be understood in this light as well. And thus, it is not surprising that several other fragments show Epicurus's concern for social *decorum*. The Epicurean sage, for instance, will take thought for his good reputation (*εὐδοξία*), though only in so far as not to be despised (DL 10.120a = Usener 573). The qualifying specification introduces a clear limit—the sage has no unbridled ambition and love for honor, but merely avoids the contempt that will entail *βλάβαι ἔξ ἀνθρώπων*—to be sure, but as a whole, the fragment shows that Epicurus was not blind to the importance of what others think of him. In the same vein, he observed that a man who is regarded with fear can never be without fear himself (Usener 537). Again, the Epicurean should thus take care of his own reputation. His general conduct should avoid negative reactions of other people as much as possible.<sup>55</sup> It may be noted in passing that this attitude remains important for later generations of Epicureans, as appears for instance from Polystratus's polemical treatise against those who irrationally despise popular beliefs and from Philodemus's attempts to show that the Epicurean philosopher also contributes to the public interest.<sup>56</sup> Philodemus's rejection of arrogance as a source of all kinds of misfortune<sup>57</sup> and his insistence that the sage deals in an affable and hospitable way with other people (*De vit., P.Herc.* 1008 col. 9.1–10) may be understood in the same light.

This tension once again demonstrates that Epicurus was a sober-minded thinker. His philosophical position shows a well-considered balance between fundamental radicalness on the one hand, and, on the other, caution and even a certain degree of conformity. Epicurus was neither a subversive

troublemaker nor a cynic who shamelessly and insolently barked at the establishment.<sup>58</sup> He was not afraid of barking whenever he thought it would be helpful, but he always took care not to bite the hand which could both feed and strike him.

## FURTHER COMPLICATING THE PICTURE: EXCEPTIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS

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But that is not all. Epicurus knew very well that the complex practice of daily life can never be completely reduced to a comprehensive theoretical perspective. In concrete situations, every Epicurean will always have to evaluate which choices will most contribute to his pleasure, both in the short run and in the long run. This *calculus* (*συμμέτρησις*; *Ep. Men.* 130) is of paramount importance for Epicurus's ethical praxis. Careful calculation and evaluation by sober reasoning (*νήφων λογισμός*; *Ep. Men.* 132) shows that the Epicurean should often prefer pain to instant pleasure because the former yields more pleasure in the long run.<sup>59</sup> This judicious computation is the task of *φρόνησις*, which is very highly esteemed by Epicurus: he calls it an even more precious thing than philosophy itself (*Ep. Men.* 132). This is quite an extraordinary statement for a philosopher, although one easily understands why Epicurus adopts this view. Philosophy can provide general insights and rules which may be valid in the great majority of situations, but it will be *φρόνησις* which, in the end, has to decide in each concrete case how the final *τέλος*, *rebus sic stantibus*, can best be reached. In everyday life, a man's happiness thus directly depends on the correct use of his *φρόνησις*.

The implications of this view can hardly be overestimated. It not only strongly conditions almost all aspects of Epicurus's view of ethically correct behavior, but it also makes its influence felt on the general character of his thinking. It results in what I have called a "qualifying philosophy."<sup>60</sup> It is quite remarkable indeed that a great many fragments of Epicurus are characterized by all kinds of qualifications. Conditional or temporal clauses introduce important provisos ("do this if x," "avoid this unless y" . . .),<sup>61</sup> predicative adjuncts or relative clauses add various nuances and

specifications,<sup>62</sup> and partitive genitives suggest the existence of distinctions in more general categories.<sup>63</sup> The most different (attributive or adverbial) adjuncts time and again recall the importance of concrete circumstances for more general rules.<sup>64</sup> It is quite remarkable in this respect that many traces of such qualifications even occur in the doxographic tradition, where clarity so often prevails over accuracy and the full emphasis is usually on the great outlines of a philosopher's position, often in contradistinction to that of rival schools. This adds to the impression that Epicurus qualified and nuanced his views as much as possible, in line with his insistence on the paramount importance of *φρόνησις*.

In the remainder of this chapter, I deal with a few examples that illustrate this qualifying character of Epicurus's philosophical thinking.

## 1. A nuanced view of the past

A good starting point is *Key Doctrine 7*:

Ἐνδοξοὶ καὶ περιβλεπτοὶ τινες ἐβουλήθησαν γενέσθαι, τὴν ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀσφάλειαν οὕτω νομίζοντες περιποιήσεσθαι. ὥστε εἰ μὲν ἀσφαλὴς ὁ τῶν τοιούτων βίος, ἀπέλαβον τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἀγαθόν· εἰ δὲ μὴ ἀσφαλὴς, οὐκ ἔχουσιν οὐ ἔνεκα ἐξ ἀρχῆς κατὰ τὸ τῆς φύσεως οἰκεῖον ὠρέχθησαν.

Some men wished to become famous and respected, believing that they would thus gain security from other men. Thus if the life of such men is secure, they acquired the natural good, but if it is not secure, they do not have that for the sake of which they strove from the beginning according to what is naturally congenial.<sup>65</sup>

This is a famous example of Epicurus's fundamental willingness to make room for exceptions. Apparently a man can engage in politics if this will bring him security (cf. also *KD 6*). We may first pause for a moment to consider the striking presence of this nuanced perspective in the *Key Doctrines*. As is well known, these are a series of fairly short, general tenets that express the core of Epicurus's thinking and were to be memorized by the members of the community. This being the case, it is quite surprising that Epicurus, near the beginning of the whole series, introduces a possible objection against his general convictions and even acknowledges its possible value. Even the *Key Doctrines* thus show the same readiness to take into account the importance of specific circumstances and the working of *φρόνησις*—a fact that was not sufficiently recognized in previous research. Apart from a few general principles such as the nothingness of

death and the ultimate end of pleasure, this is not a set of rigid rules and universal truths. On the other hand, precisely the presence of such differentiations and qualifications contributes much to the practical usefulness of the *Key Doctrines*. What the Epicurean has learned by heart is a series of fundamental principles that are nuanced enough to do justice to the particularity of specific situations and circumstances.

The implication of *KD* 7 (and 6) is thus that security can be obtained through other people (ἐξ ἀνθρώπων).<sup>66</sup> Through a brilliant political career a man might gain the power that enables him to enjoy his pleasure in perfect security. The pain of political engagement would thus have yielded a greater pleasure in the long term. Nevertheless, it would be rash for an Epicurean to use these two *Key Doctrines* as a possible justification of his decision to enter political life. First of all, his success is far from certain, and there is actually a good chance that he will end like Pyrrhus, entangled in the net of his always-increasing ambitions. More importantly, such an interpretation would run counter to the spirit of these two *Key Doctrines*. That these should definitely not be understood as a straightforward exhortation to pursue security through a political career appears from a third tenet, in which Epicurus juxtaposes the possible security that can, in a political context, be reached through other people to the purest (ἐλίκρινεστάτη) security that comes from a quiet life and withdrawal from the many (ἢ ἐκ τῆς ἡσυχίας καὶ ἐκχωρήσεως τῶν πολλῶν ἀσφάλεια; *KD* 14).

All of this shows that the main importance of *KD* 6 and 7 lies in the interpretative key which they provide for the evaluation of the past.<sup>67</sup> They enable Epicurus's followers to reinterpret the achievements of great figures of the past in light of their own Epicurean doctrine. It is all too often neglected in more recent literature that nearly all the verbs of *KD* 7 are in the past tense. Epicurus focuses in these doctrines not so much on what can be done nowadays than on what has been accomplished in earlier days. This helps to explain the presence of *KD* 6 and 7 in this collection. These two doctrines introduce an important interpretative perspective that yields many interesting advantages. They have an elenctic power in that they diminish the value of tradition. At the same time, they positively contribute to the Epicureans' self-confirmation by showing that the decisions of the great statesmen of the past, to the extent that they can be admired, perfectly illustrate the standards of Epicurus: truly successful politicians did not

selflessly serve the most “honorable” ideals, but simply knew how to pursue their own interest in a well-considered way. This perspective may be very helpful in polemical debates, as is clearly the case in Torquatus’s reply to Cicero’s attacks in *On ends* (1.34–36). It also helps the Epicurean to throw light on the direct relevance of the past for the present, and this may well explain the somewhat unexpected turn to the present tense ἔχουσιν near the end of *KD* 7. Perhaps it is no coincidence that this change in verbal tense occurs precisely in the context of the negative alternative. Examples of political success can be found in the past (ἀπέλαβον; cf. also Lucr. *DRN* 5.1105–12), whereas the present primarily illustrates political failure. If that is true, the sudden change of tense is not an example of Epicurus’s careless writing but a subtle means to steer the reader’s evaluation of both the present and the past in a specific direction. At the same time, *KD* 7 shows the all-important willingness to take into account the importance of φρόνησις. However implausible a successful outcome of a political career may be, its possibility is never categorically denied in *KD* 6 and 7, but instead is even theoretically acknowledged. For all those reasons, both *Key Doctrines* show Epicurus as an extremely sophisticated and nuanced philosopher.

## 2. The sage at the royal court

A second case is Epicurus’s conviction that the sage “will pay court to a king when the occasion is appropriate” (DL 10.121b = Usener 577: *μόναρχον ἐν καιρῷ θεραπεύσειν*). This fragment cannot be understood as an indication of Epicurus’s preference for monarchy,<sup>68</sup> but should once again be interpreted in light of the general importance which Epicurus attaches to the prudent *calculus* of desires.

In general, the presence of an Epicurean is not to be expected at the court of a king. According to Plutarch, Epicurus recommends against living with kings (τὸ συμβιοῦν βασιλεῦσι; *Against Colotes* 1127A = Usener 6\*) and in this case, Plutarch’s information is probably correct. The term *συμβιοῦν* is important in this respect, for in an Epicurean context, *συμβίωσις* is a word pregnant with meaning.<sup>69</sup> In all likelihood it denotes the pleasant living together of friends in the Garden, and implies that the members of the community really *share* (cf. *συμ-*) their lives with one another. And why should an Epicurean share his life with a monarch?

Living at the Court would imply a loss of his autonomy (cf. SV 67) and involvement in all kinds of dangerous machinations.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, it is far from certain that the king would be eager to listen to the Epicurean's *παρρησία*.<sup>71</sup> In general, then, an Epicurean has no business at a royal court.

And yet, he will occasionally go to the king. We may note in passing Epicurus's apt choice of words: in this context, the first meaning of the verb *θεραπεύειν* is obviously "to pay court to," but nothing prevents the addition of the connotation of medical treatment as well. The Epicurean's contact with a king can thus in principle aim at the latter's *Seelenheilung*, which suggests that the Epicurean will not merely subject himself but may at least to a certain extent maintain his independence.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, the Epicurean will only turn to the king if it serves his own interest, and therefore has to wait for the right opportunity. The addition of *ἐν καιρῷ* is one of the typical qualifying additions that illustrate the importance of *φρόνησις* in Epicurus's thinking. The question of how this vague reference to the *καιρός* can be understood remains to be addressed.

### 3. Exceptional circumstances: Epicureans in politics

At this point, the best way to make further progress is by broadening the question and asking when the Epicurean will engage in politics. In a famous passage, Seneca states (*Dial.* 8.3.2–3 = Usener 9; cf. also Cic. *Rep.* 1.10 and 1.11):

*Epicurus ait: non accedet ad rem publicam sapiens, nisi si quid intervenerit.*

Epicurus says: "The wise man will not engage in public affairs unless something occurs."<sup>73</sup>

This fairly vague phrase *nisi si quid intervenerit* recalls the importance of the *καιρός*. According to the traditional explanation, the Epicurean would engage in politics in emergency situations, when the general stability and social order of the state is undermined and his own tranquility of mind menaced. In such exceptional circumstances, the sage should briefly intervene in order to restore law and order, for this short pain will obviously yield much more pleasures in the long term.<sup>74</sup> And once he has succeeded in re-establishing the social stability, he can retire and resume his pleasant life.



In my view, this traditional view is problematic for several reasons. First of all, it would expose Epicurus to Cicero's pertinent objection that in such a situation, the Epicurean will be entirely powerless (*Rep.* 1.10–11). For it obviously requires much political experience and influence to deal with such emergency situations. More importantly, the traditional explanation does not reflect Epicurus's point of view. There is no reason indeed why the Epicurean would not keep to his retired life under such extreme circumstances. One may even argue that precisely at such moments, a sequestered life far away from the general public disorder would yield much greater advantages than an attempt to "take the helm of the state when the waves dash highest" (Cic. *Rep.* 1.11). Moreover, a few later texts throw additional light on Epicurus's position. Philodemus argues that it is perfectly possible to live under a bad political regime.<sup>75</sup> Alternatively, when a man is convinced that he cannot live well under bad laws, he should merely leave the place and enjoy his pleasures elsewhere (*Rhet.*, *P.Herc.* 1669 col. 24.33–39; I, 259 Sudhaus; cf. also Cic. *Phil.* 12.14). This is Epicureanism *pur sang*. The Epicurean will not identify himself with his state and its problems, and will prefer to escape the great dangers of social commotion simply by living *unnoticed*. Precisely these emergency situations tellingly show that the Epicurean can obtain and safeguard his security far better "from leisure," ἐκ τῆς ἡσυχίας (*KD* 14).

If that is true, we may well wonder when the Epicurean will engage in politics. To which exceptional situations does Seneca's phrase *nisi si quid intervenerit* refer? In my view, the most interesting information can be derived from the actual practice of the Epicureans themselves. We know of two moments in the early history of the Garden when one of the members decided to appear briefly on the public scene.<sup>76</sup> Epicurus himself sent two of his pupils to a king's court in order to refute Timocrates's slander (Plut. *Against Colotes* 1126C). This, by the way, is a striking example of μόναρχον ἐν καιρῷ θεραπεύειν. Metrodorus for his part tried to help Mithres when the latter got into trouble in the Piraeus.<sup>77</sup> In both cases, the decision to enter politics was conditioned by external circumstances rather than personal ambition, and twice, the immediate cause was a concrete situation that had direct implications for the Epicurean community. The emergency situation, in short, concerned the Garden, not the state. In the first case, Timocrates's slander campaign was a menace to Epicurus's good



reputation (*εὐδοξία*; cf. Usener 573, discussed above) and security, and as such required refutation. That Epicurus did not go himself to the court of the king, but preferred to send some of his followers, probably reflects his accurate evaluation of the situation. Whether or not he thought that these followers would be more able to obtain satisfactory results, there can be little doubt that it was in any case much safer to settle this problem through intermediaries and avoid a direct confrontation with Timocrates. Furthermore, through this “political” intervention, if it may really be called so, Epicurus did not directly aim at *ἀσφάλεια ἐξ ἀνθρώπων*.<sup>78</sup> He wisely preferred to obtain his security by staying in Athens, that is, to pursue an *ἀσφάλεια ἐκ τῆς ἡσυχίας*. This is not without importance, as it shows that *Epicurus himself had no need of KD 6 and 7 to motivate his decision to enter public life*. In the second case, Metrodorus went himself to the Piraeus, but in all likelihood his safety was far less at stake than that of Epicurus in the first case. He probably went on a fairly risk-free diplomatic mission where he had ample opportunity to remain in the shade,<sup>79</sup> and at the same time he could show that the Epicureans were really concerned about the well-being of their friends. And in this case too, the Epicurean’s *calculus* proved right, for a minimum of pain in the end yielded a great pleasure. Metrodorus’s intervention proved successful and thus caused much satisfaction and delight in the Garden.<sup>80</sup>

Both cases thus show that the Epicureans would only engage in politics, or pay court to a king, if that would serve the interest of their community or its members and friends. If that is true, this may have important implications for the evaluation of the “orthodoxy” of many Epicureans who were politically active. How should we regard, for instance, the Epicurean Diogenes of Seleucia, who long enjoyed the king’s favor in spite of his offensive behavior, until he was finally executed (Ath. 5.211a–d)? What about the Epicurean Lysias of Samos, who became tyrant in his city and slaughtered many of his fellow citizens (5.215b–c)? What about Aristion, who studied Epicurean philosophy (App. *Mith.* 28) before he became a cruel tyrant at Athens? And finally, what about the many Roman officers and politicians, including Caesar himself, who have more than once been associated with Epicureanism?<sup>81</sup> It is far too easy to refer in all of these cases systematically to *KD* 6 and 7. We already saw that Epicurus himself adopted a completely different course. Moreover, even if they entered

politics in order to obtain personal security,<sup>82</sup> we can only conclude that they usually failed to reach their end.<sup>83</sup> Their judgment was wrong and their *φρόνησις* defective. To the extent that they really regarded themselves as Epicureans, we can only conclude that they were bad Epicureans.<sup>84</sup>

More difficult is the case of Philonides and Philodemus. Both were obviously thoroughly familiar with Epicurus's view. Both regarded themselves as Epicureans, and yet both also associated with powerful rulers. The question of course remains as to whether they really *lived together* (*συμβιοῦν*) with these rulers, although they apparently did more than just occasionally *θεραπεύειν κατὰ καιρόν*. Both may have sought a creative and innovative interpretation of Epicurus's point of view in order to adapt it to their own concrete situation, but that is a topic that goes far beyond the scope of this contribution.

## CONCLUSION

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A study of Epicurus's view of politics and society is basically a study of means, not of the final end. It tells us relatively little about more fundamental philosophical topics, although these are relevant of course.<sup>85</sup> The primary focus is on ethical praxis, that is, on the selection of what contributes to pleasure and the avoidance of what is painful or harmful. In that context, Epicurus pointed to general patterns and rules. Politics, for instance, is usually a bad means to pursue pleasure, whereas security, laws, and friendship are highly appreciated. This general approach, however, was always to be based on careful observations and consistent thinking that did not refrain from criticizing widespread but erroneous convictions.

On the other hand, these general patterns never became laws of the Medes and Persians. One of the most striking characteristics of Epicurus's philosophical thinking is, as we have repeatedly seen, the sense of (conditional) qualification. Epicurus knew very well that every choice and every decision is made in concrete circumstances, and there the individual's *φρόνησις* is of paramount importance. Sound judgment and common sense are then often more helpful than philosophical insights. This is not to say, of course, that those insights are unimportant for an adequate therapy of vain desires (and irrational fears). It is clear that *φρόνησις* should be completed

by *φυσιολογία*, but in daily life, the former is in any case a most precious possession.

Epicurus's philosophy is thus permeated by sober realism. It is an open-minded way of thinking that shows much appreciation for the accurate and correct evaluation of the concrete situation. Many fragments contain telling evidence of Epicurus's well-considered and nuanced judgment and his admirable intellectual honesty. We can confidently conclude, then, that Epicurus was no tree trunk. What this study has not demonstrated is that Plutarch was no cactus either. But that is a different story.

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<sup>1</sup> On the *topos* of a pleasant, leisurely life in the shade, see Smith, "*Lentus in umbra*."

<sup>2</sup> I deal with the Epicurean doctrine of *λάθῃ βιώσας* and with the polemical objections of Epicurus's opponents respectively in Roskam, *Live Unnoticed* and *Plutarch's De latenter vivendo*, 85–179 on Plutarch. On Plutarch's criticism of Epicurus, see also the general discussions of Hershbell, "Plutarch and Epicureanism"; and Boulogne, *Plutarque dans le miroir d'Epicure*. A brief discussion of Plutarch's polemic against Epicurus's political philosophy can also be found in Roskam, "The Displeasing Secrets of the Epicurean Life." See Erler in this volume.

<sup>3</sup> Although there were exceptions who deliberately abstained from engaging in political life. On the conduct and motivations of these *ἀπραγμονεῖς*, see esp. Carter, *The Quiet Athenian*, where earlier literature can be found.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Thucydides, 2.40.2; see also Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, 229–35 on ambition and competition; and Carter, *The Quiet Athenian*, 1–25 on fame and honor.

<sup>5</sup> Hom. *Il.* 11.784: *αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων* (cf. also 6.208).

<sup>6</sup> Similar provisos can often be found in Epicurus's works and illustrate his fondness for conditional qualifying and the paramount importance he attaches to *φρόνησις*; see *infra*.

<sup>7</sup> On the importance of the notion of limit in Epicurus's philosophy, see esp. De Lacy, "Limit and Variation in the Epicurean Philosophy"; and Salem, *Tel un dieu parmi les hommes*, 83–99.

<sup>8</sup> See DL 10.117 (= Usener 536); cf. Cic. *Fin.* 1.67; and Sen. *Ep.* 14.10 and 105.1–4.

<sup>9</sup> The latter argument does not occur in Epicurus's extant works, but it can be found in Philodemus's *Rhetoric*, *P.Herc.* 1078/1080, fr. 19.6–22 (II, 158–9 Sudhaus), a passage which is quoted under Usener 552. An interesting complement to this view may be found in Philodemus, *De bono rege* col. 29 Dorandi, as is shown by Fish, "Not All Politicians Are Sisypus," 91.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Cic. *Rep.* 1.4; Lucr. *DRN* 2.11–13; 3.996–97; 5.1124 and 1132; Diogenes of Oenoanda, fr. 2.II.3–4.

<sup>11</sup> SV 14; cf. also Seneca's *dum differtur vita transcurrit* (*Ep.* 1.2), and SV 30 = Metrodorus, fr. 53 K.

<sup>12</sup> Translation B. Perrin.

<sup>13</sup> Plutarch calls him a pupil of Demosthenes (*Pyrrh.* 14.1). Stähelin, "Kineas (3)," 473 and Benferhat, *Cives Epicurei*, 44–47 regard Cineas as an Epicurean, but none of the passages which they adduce really proves that Cineas himself adheres to the doctrines which he mentions.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 28.9 (= Usener 522): *initium est salutis notitia peccati*.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., SV 54 (= Usener 220) and 64; Porphyry *Marc.* 27 (292.3–7 N = Usener 471) and 31 (294.7–11 N = Usener 221); Nussbaum, "Therapeutic Arguments."

<sup>16</sup> It is not simply rejected, though, but rather reinterpreted from a more Epicurean perspective; cf., e.g., Sen. *Ep.* 2.6 (= Usener 475); *KD* 5 (which returns, with some variations, in SV 5 and *Ep. Men.* 132); Long, "Pleasure and Social Utility," 302–304.

<sup>17</sup> *De orat.* 3.63. I deal with Cicero's anti-Epicurean position at length in *Plutarch's De latenter vivendo*, 49–69, where further literature can be found.

<sup>18</sup> Cf., e.g., Plut. *Against Colotes* 1127A; Cic. *Rep.* 1.1 and 1.3; Usener 558–60.

<sup>19</sup> Plut. *Against Colotes* 1127A–B (= Usener 560).

<sup>20</sup> On the significance of laughter in Epicureanism, see Salem, *Tel un dieu parmi les hommes*, 167–74.

<sup>21</sup> *DRN* 3.59–86, a much-discussed passage. See, e.g., Perret, “L’amour de l’argent”; Desmouliez, “Cupidité, ambition”; Schrijvers, *Horror ac divina voluptas*; Schmid, “Lucretius ethicus,” 140–51; Monti, “Lucretius on greed”; Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 90–93.

<sup>22</sup> (Plutarch, *That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible* 1098C–D (= fr. 41 K); cf. also 1100D and *Against Colotes* 1125D).

<sup>23</sup> According to Sedley, “Epicurus and His Professional Rivals,” 132 these words were not really uttered by Metrodorus himself but should be regarded as a polemical misrepresentation of Timocrates. I would rather regard it as a verbatim quotation that is isolated from its context; cf. Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 73.

<sup>24</sup> Angeli, “Frammenti di lettere,” 14 argues that the fragment probably dates from the period before the rift between Metrodorus and Timocrates.

<sup>25</sup> Translation Gummere.

<sup>26</sup> Somewhat similarly, Lucretius aims at a crown with conspicuous praise, in his capacity as a poet (*DRN* 6.95). Lucretius sometimes also takes the *communis opinio* as his starting point, which he then adapts to his own perspective; cf. Monti, “Lucretius on Greed,” 58–66; and Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 92–93. A similar approach can also be found in Cic. *Fin.* 1.43–44.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., SV 44, 45, and 77; *Ep. Men.* 130; Stobaeus 3.17.13 = Usener 135a.

<sup>28</sup> See esp. Barigazzi, “Sul concetto epicureo”; Schofield, “Social and Political Thought,” 748–56; Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 37–40.

<sup>29</sup> See also below on the paramount importance of legislation for the Epicurean’s security.

<sup>30</sup> The importance of a smooth relation with the neighbor (ὁ πλησίον, ὁ πέλας, or οἱ ὁμοροῦντες) is a recurrent motif in Epicurus’s works. See, e.g., *KD* 40; SV 15, 61, 67, 70; Plut. *Against Colotes* 1127D = fr. 134; cf. also Arrighetti2 fr. [29].11.3.

<sup>31</sup> See on this Armstrong, “Epicurean Virtues, Epicurean Friendship.”

<sup>32</sup> See Cic. *Fin.* 1.66–70. Good discussions of (aspects of) this problem can be found in Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory*, 98–128; O’Connor, “The Invulnerable Pleasures of Epicurean Friendship”; Müller, *Die Epikureische Ethik*, 110–29; O’Keefe, “Is Epicurean Friendship Altruistic?”; Brown, “Epicurus on the Value of Friendship”; Evans, “Can Epicureans Be Friends?”; Armstrong, “Epicurean Virtues, Epicurean Friendship.”

<sup>33</sup> See on Timocrates’s polemic, Sedley, “Epicurus and His Professional Rivals”; and Roskam, *Plutarch’s De latenter vivendo*, 43–49.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 6.6; DeWitt, “Epicurean *contubernium*.”

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Long, “Pleasure and Social Utility,” 286–87.

<sup>36</sup> According to Diogenes Laertius, Epicurus was a real patriot (10.10).

<sup>37</sup> A good discussion of this topic can be found in Leiwo and Remes, “Partnership of Citizens and Metics.”

<sup>38</sup> Philodemus *On Piety* col. 28.8–28 Obbink (= Usener 169); cf. also col. 20.6–11, col. 26.5–12, and col. 51.3–13 Obbink.

<sup>39</sup> DL 7.9 (= Usener 119); cf. Steckel, “Epikuros,” 591–92; and Silvestre “Epicuro e la politica,” 134–35. Kechagia, “Rethinking a Professional Rivalry,” 139 suggests that “Epicurus’ reference to the Stoics’ close association with the Macedonian court was probably unfavourable or even critical in tone.”

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 21.3 (= Angeli fr. 13; cf. Usener fr. 132): *rigidae tunc potentiae ministrum et magna tractantem*.

<sup>41</sup> He is called διοικέτης in DL 2.102 and 10.4.



<sup>42</sup> Although it is important to add that Epicurus's position may have been less absolute and that he in any case was not blind to the needs of the politician's concrete situation, as appears from his advice to Idomeneus discussed above. Later, Lucretius refrained from encouraging Memmius to withdraw from politics (*DRN* 1.41–43); cf. Fish, "Not All Politicians Are Sisyphus," 76, 87.

<sup>43</sup> We know that Mithres gave financial support to the Garden; cf. Philodemus, *Πραγματεῖαι* (*P. Herc.* 1418) col. 30.13–16 Militello (= Usener 151); 31.11–16 (= Usener 177), 35 inf. (= Arrighetti<sup>2</sup> fr. 74). When Mithres was later imprisoned, the Garden was able to return the favor and show its gratitude (cf. DeWitt, "The Epicurean Doctrine of Gratitude," on the importance of gratitude in Epicureanism), for the Syrian minister was apparently set free through an intervention of Metrodorus (Plut. *That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible* 1097B and *Against Colotes* 1126E–F = Usener 194). Idomeneus may have been helpful in securing the good contacts between the Garden at Athens and the Epicurean community at Lampsacus, as is suggested in passing by Goldschmidt, *La doctrine d'Epicure et le droit*, 59–60.

<sup>44</sup> See Momigliano, "Su alcuni dati della vita di Epicuro"; and Silvestre, "Epicuro e la politica."

<sup>45</sup> As Silvestre, "Epicuro e la politica," 136 and 138 suggests.

<sup>46</sup> This is certainly the position of Philodemus (see Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 104–25) and in all likelihood also that of Metrodorus. The latter in any case argued that the statesman and the natural philosopher both have their own domain; see Philodemus *Rhet.* VIII, *P.Herc.* 832 fr. 32,11–col. 45.2; II, 45 Sudhaus.

<sup>47</sup> Translation Einarson and De Lacy.

<sup>48</sup> Much has been written on this subject; see, e.g., Philippson, "Die Rechtsphilosophie der Epikureer"; Müller, *Die Epikureische Gesellschaftstheorie*, "Konstituierung und Verbindlichkeit," and "Die epikureische Sozial- und Rechtsphilosophie"; Goldschmidt, *La doctrine d'Epicure et le droit*; Alberti, "The Epicurean Theory of Law and Justice"; Besnier, "Justice et utilité." On Hermarchus's view see, in addition to the more general studies already mentioned, Van der Waerdt, "Hermarchus and the Epicurean Genealogy of Morals"; on Lucretius see, e.g., Manuwald, *Der Aufbau der lukrezischen Kulturentstehungslehre*.

<sup>49</sup> Alberti, "The Epicurean Theory of Law and Justice," 181 most interestingly points to *Ep. Hdt.* 68–71, where Epicurus distinguishes between bodies, which exist per se, and properties, which do not but which have nevertheless real existence too. This clear parallel does not alter the fact that *KD* 33 also has an obvious anti-Platonic ring, as has been noted by the majority of commentators.

<sup>50</sup> Eusebius *PE* 6.8.14 (= *SVF* 3.324); cf. Cicero *Ac.* 2.136 (= *SVF* 3.599); and Plut. *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1033F.

<sup>51</sup> Epicurus's seemingly ambivalent position was often attacked. Plutarch (*Against Colotes* 1127A) sharply notes that the Epicureans are the only ones among the many philosophers who share in the goods of the community life of the *polis* without contributing anything at all (*ἀσύμβολοι*, quite a significant term in view of *KD* 31, where Epicurus defines the "justice of nature" (*τὸ τῆς φύσεως δίκαιον*) as a *σύμβολον τοῦ συμφέροντος* aimed at mutual non-interference). The literature about this controversial passage is immense; thorough philological discussions can be found in Bollack, *La pensée du plaisir*, 353–59; and Goldschmidt, *La doctrine d'Epicure et le droit*, 25–41. A similar attack against Epicurus's supposed "parasitism" can be found in Cicero (*De orat.* 3.64) and Epictetus (2.20.6–20 and 3.7.19). I deal with Cicero's and Epictetus's attacks in Roskam, *Plutarch's De latenter vivendo*, 66–68 and 82–84.

<sup>52</sup> Especially illustrative is a fragment from a manuscript from Paris (Usener 187), which in its Latin version also occurs in Seneca (*Ep.* 29.10): "I never desired to please the many, for I did not learn the things which please them, and what I did learn was far removed from their perception." Translation Inwood and Gerson; οὐδέποτε ὥρέχθην τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀρέσκειν. ἃ μὲν γὰρ ἐκείνοις ἤρεσκεν, οὐκ ἔμαθον· ἃ δ' ἥδειν ἐγὼ, μακρὰν ἦν τῆς ἐκείνων αἰσθήσεως. Basically the same

attitude can be found in Sen. *Ep.* 25.6 (= Usener 209) and Porph. *Marc.* 30 (294.2–3 N) = Usener 489. For Epicurus's preference for a small circle, see Sen. *Ep.* 7.11 = Usener 208.

<sup>53</sup> Translation Inwood and Gerson, slightly modified.

<sup>54</sup> Such as *προσπιύω τῷ καλῷ* (discussed above), or the view that *ἀρχὴ καὶ ρίζα παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ ἡ τῆς γαστρὸς ἡδονή* (Ath. 7.280a and 12.546f = Usener 409; cf. Gargiulo, “Epicuro e ‘il piacere del ventre’” on this fragment).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. also *KD* 39 and Plut. *Against Colotes* 1127D (= Usener 134).

<sup>56</sup> Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 121–25.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, 149.

<sup>58</sup> According to DL 10.8 (= Usener 238), Epicurus even called the Cynics “enemies of Greece”; cf. also 10.119 (= Usener 14).

<sup>59</sup> See, e.g., *KD* 8; SV 16 and 71; *Ep. Men.* 129–30; Sen. *Ep.* 18.9 (= Usener 158); Cic. *Tusc.* 5.95 (= Usener 439); Eusebius, *PE* 14.21.4 (= Usener 442).

<sup>60</sup> Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 148 and *passim*.

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g., SV 21 and 51.

<sup>62</sup> See, e.g., Plut. *Against Colotes* 1125C (= Usener 554): *ἄριστα* and *ἐκὼν εἶναι*; DL 10.121b (= Usener 564): *ἀλλ' οὐχ' ἐκόντα*; DL 10.121b (= Usener 567): *ἀλλ' ἀπὸ μόνης σοφίας*; etc.

<sup>63</sup> Cf., e.g., *KD* 32: *ὅσα τῶν ζώων* and *τῶν ἐθνῶν ὅσα*.

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., *KD* 6 (*ποτέ*); DL 10.119 = Usener 19 (*κατὰ περίστασιν δέ ποτε βίου*); 10.121b = Usener 590 (*ποτέ*); DL 10.121b = Usener 577 (*ἐν καιρῷ*); etc.

<sup>65</sup> Translation Inwood and Gerson, strongly modified.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 37–40.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Besnier, “Justice et utilité,” 154–55.

<sup>68</sup> See also Benferhat, *Ciues Epicurei*; and Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 54–55; *contra* Gigante and Dorandi, “Anassarco e Epicuro ‘Sul Regno’”; and Fowler, “Lucretius and Politics,” 130.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Del Mastro, “Il *PHerc.* 1589,” 224.

<sup>70</sup> One might recall Plato's fate in Sicily. According to DL 10.8 (= Usener 238), Epicurus called the followers of Plato “flatterers of Dionysius.”

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Philodemus *On Frank Criticism* col. 23b.12–24a.7. Colotes dedicated his work to King Ptolemy (cf. Plut. *Against Colotes* 1107E), to be sure, but addressing a book to a king is obviously not the same as living with him.

<sup>72</sup> One may compare the position of Philodemus; see Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 121–25.

<sup>73</sup> Translation Basore, modified.

<sup>74</sup> See, e.g., Bringmann in Long, “Pleasure and Social Utility,” 321–22; Griffin, “Philosophy, Politics, and Politicians at Rome,” 30; Besnier, “Justice et utilité,” 148; Asmis, “The Politician as Public Servant,” 118. On the basis of Plut. *Life of Brutus* 12.3, Sedley, “The Ethics of Brutus and Cassius,” 47 adds that such extreme situations could create in the Epicureans “an overriding sense of obligation to their non-philosophical fellow-citizens.”

<sup>75</sup> *Rhet.* VIII, *P.Herc.* 1015/832 col. 57.11–16 (II, 63 Sudhaus), with the analysis of Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 117 and 120.

<sup>76</sup> I deal with a few other cases in Roskam, *Plutarch's De latenter vivendo*, 39–40.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. n. 43 above.

<sup>78</sup> He rather tried to avoid *βλάβαι ἐξ ἀνθρώπων* (viz. the harm caused by Timocrates) and therefore adopted an intelligent double strategy: staying himself in his own safe environment at Athens and trying to refute Timocrates's slander from a distance, through intermediaries who would run less risk than he would do.

<sup>79</sup> One may compare, *mutatis mutandis*, the attitude of Cicero's friend Atticus.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Plut. *That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible* 1097B and *Against Colotes* 1126E–F = Usener 194.

<sup>81</sup> Momigliano, “Review of *Science and Politics in the Ancient World*,” Castner, *Prosopography of Roman Epicureans*; Benferhat, *Ciues Epicurei*; on Caesar see also Rambaud, “César et l’Epicurisme.” Interesting material on other Epicureans who were politically active can be found in Koch, *Comment peut-on être dieu?*, 51–75.

<sup>82</sup> A fairly implausible hypothesis, after all, since the sources often suggest that their decision was based on different motivations such as ambition or other unnecessary and empty desires.

<sup>83</sup> One could object that their political engagement could also be motivated in a different way. According to Plutarch, Epicurus did not believe that “men who are eager for honor and glory (τοὺς φιλοτίμους καὶ φιλοδόξους) should lead an inactive life, but that they should fulfill their natures by engaging in politics and entering public life, on the ground that, because of their natural dispositions, they are more likely to be disturbed and harmed by inactivity (ἀπραγμοσύνης) if they do not obtain what they desire” (*On Tranquility of Mind* 465F–466A = Usener 555; translation Helmbold). First of all, however, this may well be a misrepresentation of Epicurus’s position, in that Plutarch may have turned Epicurus’s originally descriptive statement into a normative one (see Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 52–54). In any case, it was Plutarch, not Epicurus, who was especially preoccupied with φιλοτιμία (cf., e.g., Frazier, “A propos de la ‘philotimia’ dans les ‘Vies’”; and Pelling, *Plutarch and History*, *passim*), and the term ἀπραγμοσύνη likewise sounds more Platonic than Epicurean (thus rightly Grilli, “Considerazioni sul fr. 555 Us. di Epicuro,” 385). If this is true, the only possible value of the fragment is based on the words τῇ φύσει (thus again Grilli, “Considerazioni sul fr. 555 Us. di Epicuro,” 385), which is quite poor and even problematic, for Epicurus never recommends to follow nature on an irrational basis. See esp. Morel, *Epicure. La nature et la raison*; cf. also Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory*, 119 n. 39.

<sup>84</sup> This conclusion, however, may be in need of some Epicurean qualification, as I realized when I read the forthcoming contribution of Jeff Fish on the Roman Epicureans (now Fish, “Not All Politicians Are Sisyphus”). In the context of the late Roman Republic, people of inherited status such as Calpurnius Piso may well have found it more difficult to live unnoticed than to enter the *cursus honorum*. It is true that fifth- and fourth-century Athens knew its aristocratic ἀπράγμονες too (cf. *supra* n. 3), but there remain important differences with the political situation of well-born Roman aristocrats. This is not to say that these were doomed from birth, as it were, to enter politics and endure its troubles, but as every Epicurean, they had to judge their situation with sober φρόνησις, and it is not impossible that in their case, the *calculus* of pleasure and pain yielded somewhat “atypical” results. I prefer to leave the matter here and refer to Fish, “Not All Politicians Are Sisyphus” for an in-depth discussion of this question; see also the interesting discussion of Armstrong, “Epicurean Virtues, Epicurean Friendship.”

<sup>85</sup> E.g. Epicurus’s view of man, more particularly his conviction that man is not social by nature but only loves others *sua causa*; cf. Lactantius *Inst.* 3.17.39 (= Usener 581); cf. also Usener 523, 540, and esp. 580\*.

## CHAPTER 12

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# LANGUAGE

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ENRICO PIERGIACOMI

THE Epicurean analysis of language has become a battleground divided between two major camps. As Atherton already noted, we may distinguish a debate between “extensionalists” and “intensionalists.”<sup>1</sup> Extensionalism represents the traditional interpretation—one that found its most rigorous expression in a seminal article by Anthony Long. Intensionalism recognizes instead its champion in David Glidden, who challenged in important respects the extensionalist view.<sup>2</sup>

In approaching the disagreement between these two exegetical positions, it will perhaps be helpful to distinguish three main philosophical issues. The first is the description of the relationship between language and reality. Extensionalists hold that Epicureans believe that words refer to things through some medium, typically the “meanings” of terms that show what qualities or properties are possessed by the objects that are signified. Intensionalists, however, think that words express things directly and thus do not require the medium of meaning. Accordingly, they claim that it is misleading to speak of an Epicurean “theory of language,” because Epicureans hold a philosophy of linguistic behavior. Indeed, Epicureans, on this view, maintain that our words represent how we behave when we

communicate with each other, just like the sounds or utterances of animals that communicate something without “meaning” anything.

A second point of disagreement concerns the origin of language, more precisely the passage from the private utterances of primitive human beings to the social or codified ones employed in civilizations. Extensionalists argue that Epicureans believed this happened when human beings found words that better captured the meanings of the things to which they were trying to refer. Intensionalists, on the other hand, claim that this particular transformation occurred purely through changes in behavior. If in earlier historical periods individual human beings employed their own personal ways to refer to reality, later on they began to employ some codified versions. Meaning has once again no role in this process, however, because language is a matter of what specific words accompany particular behaviors.

The third area of disagreement lies in the description of how errors arise in our communication. Words often refer to non-existent things (e.g., centaurs), or mistakenly refer to things that do exist, as happens, for instance, when I say “I see Socrates near the tower,” when in reality the person near the tower is Plato. So we need an explanation of how such errors arise. Extensionalists claim that Epicureans employed a conceptual test. We recognize that a word like “centaur” signifies something impossible or inconceivable, or that a phrase like “I see Socrates near the tower” errs in attributing to the distant man the quality “being Socrates” instead of “being Plato.” Such a test shows, therefore, that sometimes we use words to express some subjective constructions, rather than objective (= real) counterparts. On the contrary, intensionalists claim that Epicureans require only an empirical test. Errors arise because words are associated with the wrong referents. They would be true, hence refer to real things, if as in the case of “centaur” one referred to the movement of the mind that makes me see an image of a creature that is half man and half horse; or if with the phrase “I see Socrates near the tower” one is referring to a state of affairs where that person is actually near the tower.

I will argue that Epicurean evidence about the nature of language, though scanty, nonetheless allows us to conclude that an extensionalist interpretation is more likely. In some sense, therefore, I will not be presenting a novel reading or a compromise position between the two established camps. But in defending the traditional interpretation, I will try

to shed some new light by setting out the historical development of Epicurean analysis of language. Scholars tend to concentrate mostly on Epicurus and Lucretius, while giving only minor attention to contributions of other Epicureans. I believe that an investigation of the development of Epicurus's analysis of language will show that nuances were introduced by his later pupils. Although the core of the master's doctrine remained, some of these later contributions have significant philosophical import.<sup>3</sup>

## EPICURUS'S LINGUISTIC METHODOLOGY

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A reconstruction of Epicurus's original position should start from the summary found in his *Epistle to Herodotus*. The most important claim is placed at the beginning (37–38). Epicurus writes that the study of physics must start from the grasp of things that underline *φθόγγοι* (*τὰ ὑποτεταγμένα τοῖς φθόγγοις*), otherwise we would miss the *πρῶτον ἐννόημα* that requires no demonstration or clarification and that allows us to settle questions, develop opinions, and raise problems. What is more, all the *φθόγγοι* that can receive such scrutiny are opposed to *φθόγγοι* that are empty, i.e. that do not help one to proceed in scientific inquiry. It is probable that the method here described was applied to different fields of inquiry. For example, Cicero reports its usage in ethics, more precisely in the analysis of honesty and pleasure (*Tusc.* 3.18.42, *Fin.* 2.1.3–2.6 and 15.48 = fr. 69, 257, 264 Usener).

Many terms that I have deliberately left in Greek are not immediately perspicuous in this dense passage. The least controversial is *φθόγγοι*. As has been recognized, the term may have the meaning of generic vocal sounds or utterances,<sup>4</sup> which include names but are not limited to them. A brief look at the section of the letter dedicated to the origin of language—where *φθόγγοι* again appear (75–76)—may confirm this idea. The context shows that Epicurus wants to explain the origin of names. So they must be included among *φθόγγοι*. However, the reference to utterances—like “void”—that some experts developed by using reasoning (*λογισμός*)—also makes clear that *φθόγγοι* must include expressions more complex than single *ὀνόματα*. This, for instance, is the case for *ἀναφής φύσις* (intangible nature), which is a way of speaking of void in technical terms.<sup>5</sup>



Much more problematic is the significance of *πρῶτον ἔννοημα*. It is here that the debate between extensionalists and intensionalists arises. The former argue that *πρῶτον ἔννοημα* might be a reference to a *πρόληψις* or preconception, which Cicero (*ND* 1.17.44) and Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 2.4.16.3 = fr. 255 Usener) trace back to Epicurus himself. Diogenes Laertius (10.33), however, attributes it to Epicureans in general. According to these sources, preconceptions are direct apprehensions, true beliefs, concepts, and universal thoughts that are formed from the outside by the repeated impressions of simulacra emitted by objects, which ultimately are stored in our memory through an act of focalization of the mind (*ἐπιβολὴ τῆς διανοίας*). They allow us, moreover, to make inquiries and to name things, but are also what are primarily underlined (*τὸ πρῶτως ὑποτεταγμένον*) in all names, and in turn are evident and consist in the meanings commonly attached to them by individuals. In this sense, preconceptions are irrefutable criteria of truth, since no one who pronounces “cow” will ever fail to make the hearer think of this animal with its specific form and behavior. The extensionalists conclude, therefore, that the *πρῶτον ἔννοημα* is the “pre”-conception that one finds underlying all our *φθόγγοι*, while the main properties of the named object represent the common meaning of a linguistic utterance.<sup>6</sup>

However, Glidden has challenged this claim by objecting that, if *πρῶτον ἔννοημα* is really “a stand-in for *πρόληψις*, one must go on to read the passage as requiring a *πρόληψις* for every utterance.” But this is contradicted by *Ep. Hdt.* 72, where Epicurus says that we must study time not by looking at a preconception stored in us. We must do so by reasoning from analogy with evident phenomena that make us pronounce utterances like “short time” or “long time.” The philosopher recognizes then that *χρόνος* has a name, but no *πρόληψις*. Moreover, Sextus Empiricus and Plutarch report that Epicureans eliminated propositions (*λεκτά*), which in their opinion are necessary to develop concepts and preconceptions.<sup>7</sup> Glidden claims that Epicureans could not admit the “meanings” of terms. The *πρῶτον ἔννοημα* must then be interpreted differently, in his opinion, as the “first referent” of each utterance. As regards the *πρόληψις* itself, Glidden proposes that it could be read as a “referent of a mass term,” i.e. a word that refers to many things that share the same properties: for example,



“motion” is a preconception, because it refers to all things that move in the universe.<sup>8</sup>

Glidden’s case seems not entirely consistent. Since preconceptions are also true beliefs, it seems implausible to claim that they have no meaning. For a δόξα is declared to be false or true through an analysis of its contents, i.e. of what it means.<sup>9</sup> This appears particularly evident for the preconception underlined in the name “god,” that entails the true belief “blessed and immortal living being” (*Ad Men.* 124). Since divine activities are not directly observable, the πρόληψις of θεός cannot be a habitual referent of what we repeatedly perceive within the environment;<sup>10</sup> hence, the truth-value of this δόξα could be checked only with conceptual analysis, such as by reasoning that possessing blessedness and immortality means avoiding painful acts (e.g. governing the world).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, DL 10.33 explicitly reports that a preconception underlines all names (cf. παντὶ ὀνόματι) and this includes “time.”<sup>12</sup> As other scholars have noticed,<sup>13</sup> Epicurus’s claim that χρόνος does not have a preconception that is stored in us does not then signify that it does not have a preconception at all. It means that the πρόληψις of the word “time” is derived by looking at external phenomena to which time is attached, like the passage from day into night. With respect to Sextus Empiricus’s and Plutarch’s reports about the elimination of λεκτά, Epicureans might only require relations between words and things without the *medium* of propositions. Thus, the idea that προλήψεις require λεκτά is not necessary, for it might be a tendentious addition of Sextus/Plutarch. That preconceptions proceed directly through words is confirmed in Diogenes Laertius (10.33).<sup>14</sup> Here we read that, by pronouncing a word like ἄνθρωπος, one immediately (εὐθύς) thinks κατὰ πρόληψιν what a human being is.

One could raise an obvious objection. If each name is made meaningful by a preconception, it follows that the word “centaur” also has a πρόληψις. But this would entail that it also embodies a true belief and universal concept derived from the outside, which is absurd. Indeed, since we know that centaurs do not exist, would not the argument that preconceptions are meanings associated with each name contradict itself?<sup>15</sup> The answer to this objection is that, on the one hand, even the πρόληψις of a centaur is actually derived externally. It consists, after all, in the repeated experience of the mental representation of this monster caused by the motion of simulacra of

a horse combined with those of a human being.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the true belief associated with a name does not always require the existence of the named object. The association of “centaur” would be, for example, that of “non-existent animal of such and such form, color, behavior.”<sup>17</sup>

If, then, preconceptions are what give meanings to all names and their recognition is the premise of every philosophical inquiry, we could suppose that the opposition between empty *φθόγγοι* and *φθόγγοι* implicitly “full” (i.e., that keep a *πρῶτον ἐννόημα*) might be read as follows. Utterances of the first kind do not respect the *προλήψεις* that are underlined in them, while those of the second kind do so.<sup>18</sup> In the case of non-existent objects like a centaur, a full *φθόγγος* would be “centaurs do not exist,” an empty one “centaurs live among us.” In the case of existing things, like the soul (*Ep. Hdt.* 67), the same principle holds. A phrase or *φθόγγος* like “the soul is incorporeal” is empty, because it does not respect the *πρόληψις* of “incorporeal” or *ἄσώματον* that emerges with the common usage of this name, namely “being thinkable by itself.” The *ψυχή* is conceivable, after all, through the active effects that it has on the body (e.g., the power of sensation) and the passive effects that it receives from the body (e.g., the protection from external blows).<sup>19</sup> Instead, the contrary statement “the soul is corporeal” is a “full” *φθόγγος*. For it respects the preconception of *σῶμα*, that requires that all bodies touch and are touched by bodies.<sup>20</sup>

So the traditional interpretation, that the things underlined in each utterance are the preconceptions, remains sound. A question remains unclear, however. Does the *πρόληψις* that emerges from common usage represent the “natural” meaning of the words that we use? Once again, sources do not give a direct answer. But a brief look at the doctrine of the origin of language might hint at a plausible solution.

Epicurus distinguishes in *Ep. Hdt.* 75–76 two stages in the formation of names.<sup>21</sup> The first occurs at the beginning of civilization (*ἐξ ἀρχῆς*), when the natures of human beings were influenced by the environment. They received proper affections and representations (*ἴδια πάθη, ἴδια φαντάσματα*) from external things that in turn were expressed by their properly emitting air (*ἰδίως τὸν ἀέρα ἐκπέμπειν*). Such utterances are already *ὀνόματα* of objects,<sup>22</sup> although they are not as clear and synthetic as those developed in the successive (*ὑστερον*) period. Here, indeed, human beings established proper expressions (*τὰ ἴδια*) to commonly (*κοινῶς*) refer to these same

objects, which also were less ambiguous and prolix than the previous *φθόγγοι*.<sup>23</sup> The insistence on *ἴδιος* and its cognate adverb *ἰδίως* shows that all languages (Greek, Scythian, etc.) are “private” idioms. Each has different means to refer to different things.<sup>24</sup> However, in the second stage, when the natural responses are codified in conventional expressions, the private dimension is abandoned, at least by the individuals of the same nation. Private expressions are replaced by expressions that allow one to communicate.

Now, when does the formation of preconceptions occur? Since the causes of affections and representations that occurred in the first stage probably correspond to the repeated reception of simulacra emitted by external objects, it is not implausible to suppose this was the starting point of the formation of *προλήψεις* in human memory. At the same time, however, these first utterances were ambiguous and prolix. They did not yet have the clearness or *ἐνάργεια* that DL 10.33 attributes explicitly to preconceptions. So I think that it is necessary to suppose that successive conventions and the teaching of experts (*Ep. Hdt.* 76) ended the process of the formation of preconceptions. It is here that the act of *ἐπιβολὴ τῆς διανοίας*, which (as we have seen above) “completes” the *πρόληψις*, might occur.

If this is true, it could be said that the dialectical process between nature and convention responsible for the formation of language<sup>25</sup> could be extended to the formation of preconceptions. These might not therefore just be the natural meanings of terms. Preconceptions might be culturally refined natural notions that one fully grasps by speaking in the most proper way. This hypothesis agrees with Arrighetti’s interpretation of the *λέξεις κύριαι* that Epicurus used to employ—and that Aristophanes the Grammarian considered too personal (*ἰδιωτάτη*)<sup>26</sup>—as the philosophical terminology that expresses in the best way a *πρόληψις* of a given thing.

Thus far, Epicurus’s writings have indicated that his analysis of language had a methodological function. Studying our utterances or *φθόγγοι* is needed in order to recognize the preconceptions that allow us to make sound inquiries about nature. Even if Epicurus does not state this explicitly, it is a study that contributes to his ethical goal. If *φυσιολογία* is practiced for calming our souls (*Ep. Hdt.* 37, RS XI–XII), then language that allows us to proceed in physics has in turn an instrumental ethical function: otherwise,

we would not study it. Further evidence for this hypothesis comes from the fact that he rejects other linguistic activities that do not contribute to this goal, or even damage our well-being, like rhetoric and literary criticism (cf. fr. 5–6, 46–56 Usener).

Epicurus's *magnum opus*, *Περὶ φύσεως*, especially Book 28, dedicated entirely to language and the problem of the linguistic expression of things imperceptible,<sup>27</sup> may confirm most of what has been said until now, as well as give important details about the application of this methodology and its ethical value. First, it shows that Epicurus's method aimed at confuting the practice of changing names,<sup>28</sup> playing with terms, or having recourse to empty utterances, which obscures the preconception of a thing and generates confusions/turmoil in souls. Thus, for instance, in Book 21,<sup>29</sup> Epicurus argues that some opinions damage and cause us stress because they are based only on empty names (*[κενᾶ]*<sup>30</sup> *ὀνόμα[τα]*), i.e. without mental content. In Book 25, he attacks the determinists who contradict themselves by calling “necessity” the power that is in us to make free decisions and of which we have a clear *πρόληψις*.<sup>31</sup> In Book 28, he attacks some philosophers (possibly the Megarians) that worry us with their linguistic paradoxes.<sup>32</sup>

Second, Epicurus's *Περὶ φύσεως* explains that the method of having recourse to common usage for making inquiries does not mean that we have to trust all linguistic conventions. Words in themselves are ambiguous and generic because they have many meanings. Confusions might therefore occur precisely because we do not distinguish the one that most fits with a specific scientific inquiry.<sup>33</sup> An example is Epicurus's methodological observation on the *λεπτότης* of the simulacra, which must not be confounded with the homonym “fineness” of other objects (such as that of mosquitoes or bees).<sup>34</sup>

Third, and finally, we find the important claim in Book 28 that “all human error is exclusively of the form that arises in relation to preconceptions and appearances because of the manifold conventions of language.”<sup>35</sup> This allows us to deduce that to determine whether a verbal utterance like an argument or an opinion is true or false means to check whether its contents respect phenomena and the *πρόληψις* of a thing together.<sup>36</sup> This point is explicitly made in fr. 13 col. 12 sup. (ll. 12–16),

where it is stated that one avoids falling into falsehood by using an evident canon, which may be another way of referring to preconceptions (cf. DL 10.31). Earlier in the same book,<sup>37</sup> moreover, Epicurus recognizes that a clear study of language confutes two kinds of error. On the one hand, we have the mistakes concerning opinions and discourses about practice, which fade away when an empirical test shows that a specific action does not produce the ethical advantage that one was searching for, or that it brings something disadvantageous. An example that may be adduced here is from the preconception of justice (RS XXXVII–XXXVIII). When the decrees of laws (νομισθέντα) do not prescribe something that is advantageous for bringing citizens to a peaceful association, they contradict what one expects from the πρόληψις of δίκαιος (= the advantage for social life), hence they must be regarded as empty φθόγγοι that contradict the canon of preconception.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, the second kind of error confuted by the study of language is identified with theoretical opinions, which disappear either by noticing that theoretical absurdities derive from them, or once again, that they produce ethical disadvantages. In the former case, one may presumably think of the aforementioned belief about the soul's incorporeal nature, which leads to the absurd idea that the ψυχή (like void) influences not the body nor is influenced by body, while in the latter case one may adduce an utterance like “gods are interested in us,” because it leads to vain turmoil (*Ep. Hdt.* 77, 81).<sup>39</sup> What is clear in this treatment of the two kinds of error is that it confirms once more the instrumental and ethical value of the Epicurean analysis of language. These mistakes are not simply harmful for knowledge; they must be dissolved for achieving our ultimate goal of pleasure.

## ORTHODOXY AND INNOVATIONS FROM METRODORUS TO POLYSTRATUS

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Epicurus's analysis of language represents a doctrine that none of his followers was allowed to dismiss. Indeed, textual evidence shows how it remained unquestioned in the first and second generations of the Epicurean school.

A first confirmation comes from Metrodorus. Sedley had already noticed that Book 28 of the *Περὶ φύσεως* also contains Epicurus's report of the linguistic views of this Epicurean. Epicurus himself had shared the opinions of Metrodorus in the past, but now expounds them to a large audience of pupils (fr. 13, coll. 12.11 inf.–13.13 sup.), while noticing their limits and defects, especially the dangerous assumption of some conventionalist claims about the nature of language.<sup>40</sup> Tepedino Guerra has advanced some revisions to Sedley's reconstruction. Metrodorus probably wrote a treatise that focused on the problem of naming things which are invisible.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, he never held a conventionalist conception of language; he simply raised some problems of consistency/method that required a solution, which suggests that Epicurus and Metrodorus did not enter into a polemic. As Tepedino Guerra argues, Book 28 represents actually “il punto di partenza per proporre ai presenti quanto è maturato attraverso riflessioni e dubbi, autocritiche e anche cambiamenti dovuti probabilmente alla spinta degli avversari.”<sup>42</sup>

But what were Metrodorus's personal contributions? Fragments of Book 28 enable us to distinguish those that Epicurus approved of in the past from those that he came to view to be false or problematic. The master praises Metrodorus for his attempts to create a philosophical vocabulary that at the same time respects common usage and corrects the ambiguity of words, thus confuting also those who attributed to the latter some absurd senses (fr. 4, coll. 4.3 inf.–5.13 sup.; fr. 11, col. 11). However, Epicurus recognizes that, in his choice of some of his terms (fr. 13 col. 2.3 inf.–3.13 sup.), Metrodorus did not provide confirmatory evidence from phenomena and did not notice some counter evidence to his selection (fr. 11, col. 11), so that he fell into the same ambiguities and absurdities that he struggled to avoid.

This summary is enough to suppose that Metrodorus did not introduce major innovations into Epicurus's analysis of language. He may have tried to reinforce the method of establishing some *λέξεις κύριαι* that let preconceptions of words emerge. Confirmation derives from those texts that show how Metrodorus investigated common language: (1) in his attempt to recognize the true meaning of poverty, i.e. as the lack of many things, and to attack Aristotle's lost work *On Wealth*, which in his opinion did violence to the *πρόληψις* underlined in the term “moneymaker”;<sup>43</sup> (2) his attempt to classify the kinds of fearsome passions that many group under the single



ambiguous word of “fear”;<sup>44</sup> (3) his investigation conducted together with Epicurus and Hermarchus of the true meaning of “wrath,” necessary for inquiring if and to what extent the wise man will ever feel enraged.<sup>45</sup>

Much the same procedure will come to be shared by the Epicureans Colotes and Polystratus. The former searched for the exact meaning of the utterance “good poet” with the aim of confuting the pedagogical perspective of Plato’s *Lysis*, which attached to the expression a false pedagogical and erotic meaning.<sup>46</sup> The latter urges us to recognize the true ethical content that emerges from the opinions held by human beings in general,<sup>47</sup> i.e. from their linguistic common usages.

Hermarchus, however, might be interpreted as an Epicurean who presented original philosophical innovations. Proof comes here from two texts. The first is a fragment of Hermarchus’s criticism of the Empedoclean metaphor, the intent of which is not clear. Among the many interpretations that could be given,<sup>48</sup> I tend to agree, because of its theological context, with the supposition that the Epicurean wanted to reject Empedocles’s reading of divine names as metaphors for the four elements which are venerated because they bring life to mortals.<sup>49</sup> If that is true, Hermarchus would be continuing a polemic of Epicurus, who had endorsed the respect of divine names and their traditional meaning, while attacking those philosophers like Antisthenes who studied the etymologies of these ὀνόματα with the intent of demonstrating that they prove the existence not of many, but of a single divinity.<sup>50</sup>

The second text concerns the arguments for the attribution of voice and language to gods, which are both necessary for preserving their blessedness and immortality, i.e. the πρόληψις of θεός.<sup>51</sup> Here we have comparably more interesting evidence, because it indirectly reports some additions to Epicurus’s analysis of language. On the one hand, Hermarchus argues that one of the reasons the gods must have voice is that they are anthropomorphic living beings. They must then release utterances (ἐκκοπτόντων ἀναφθέγματα) in ways not different from us. Given the similarity of the expression with Epicurus’s § 75 of the *Epistle to Herodotus* (τὸν ἄερα ἐκπέμπειν), it could be supposed that Hermarchus is recognizing here that divine and human beings are identical in one respect. Both express their private feelings by emitting the proper vocalizations. On the other hand, Hermarchus claims that gods must speak Greek or something similar



to Greek. Indeed, all wise men have articulations of speech that are not too different (μὴ πολὺ διαφερούσαις κατὰ τὰς ἀρθρώσεις χρῆσθαι φωναῖς). And since Epicurus already recognized that a σοφός is just the man who speaks Greek (fr. 226 Usener = Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.15.66), then it is plain why gods—who are implicitly regarded by Hermarchus as σοφοί—must at least have a language similar to Greek.

We could regard this last argument as a philosophical innovation that the Master himself did not develop. Nowhere do we read that Epicurus thought that gods must vocalize or speak. Actually, he could have held the opinion that they do not use voice at all (Cic. *ND* 1.33.92). Moreover, Hermarchus's argument offers the basis for the following supposition. The Greek language is superior and worthy of wise men for unspecified reasons. Now, since σοφία is a virtue only when it contributes to pleasure (Cic. *Fin.* 1.13.43–14.46), we could imagine that Greek is proper to the σοφοί because it is the most conducive διὰλεκτος for knowledge that exists. Why so? Since in the previous section we have seen that names developed in the second phase of the origin of language clarify the reference to natural preconceptions, it could be supposed in turn that Greek is a language that expresses these same προλήψεις less ambiguously. Therefore, it may be more conducive to inquiries that gain the knowledge necessary for well-being.

## POETRY, TRANSLATION, UTILITAS: LUCRETIUS'S PERSPECTIVE

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If we now move to Lucretius's *De rerum natura* and try to search for signs of a potential development in the Epicurean analysis of language, we face a methodological problem. It has been argued that the poem may be a work of a “fundamentalist” Epicurean, namely one that faithfully expounds the contents of the books of the *Περὶ φύσεως* through the medium of poetry. The analysis of language may therefore be one of the many topics that are expounded while looking back at the founder of Epicureanism.<sup>52</sup>

Detailed comparisons between Epicurus and Lucretius have shown, however, that their accounts show some explicit internal differences.<sup>53</sup>

Nonetheless, I will try to argue that most Lucretian claims about language can be traced back to the original teachings of Epicurus, with two notable exceptions. Let us begin with the points of convergence.

Probably orthodox are the many scattered passages of the poem where Lucretius tries to establish why a thing or phenomenon received its right name from experience. Examples of this practice include his discussion of *animus* and *anima*, which sometimes are conjoined into a single name because they are unitary and connected (3.417–24), yet at other times are distinguished clearly (e.g., when the *animus* is identified with the *mens*, since that is where all rational operations occur: 3.94–97, 3.136–42); *sensus* (3.350–55); *amor*, which the poet derives from *umor* (4.1049–60);<sup>54</sup> *fretum*, which is the technical name of the *fulmen* that is produced during autumn (6.371–78). Also orthodox is the practice of showing the “empty” use of a word. This occurs in 3.98–135, where we find Lucretius’s polemic against those philosophers and practitioners who identified the soul with the “harmony” of the body.<sup>55</sup> The poet insists here that the Greek original that he translates with *harmonia* (3.100) was badly misplaced from the realm of music to physics (3.130–35) and makes an interesting hypothesis of its cause. Maybe “harmony” was derived from an unknown object different from the soul. However, since the latter was in the past without a name (3.134: *tum res nomine egebat*), it may have happened that *harmonia* was given to it for filling this gap. The practice of calling the soul a “harmony” was a linguistic habit that now must be substituted with better candidates that express its nature, namely *animus* and *anima*.

With some caution, there is reason to believe also that this kind of explanation derives ultimately from orthodox Epicurean teachings. The recognition of nameless things is proved by the identification of an *ἄκατονόμαστος* fourth quality of the soul, composed of fine atoms and responsible for perception/thought, that Lucretius describes in 3.237–45 and 3.273–75 and that external sources already attribute to Epicurus.<sup>56</sup> Even if we do not have textual confirmation, this may not have been the only thing or phenomenon of the sort. The precedent of Aristotle—who also recognized a psychic quality without a name—showed indeed that many objects of ordinary experience actually lack names, and not necessarily for some metaphysical mysterious reason. More simply, common usage did not find terms for referring to these things and phenomena.<sup>57</sup> Lucretius’s

explanation may then have derived from Epicurus, who in turn may have followed Aristotle in thinking that this fourth quality has no name, due to its lack of existence in ordinary expression.<sup>58</sup>

More controversial is the problem of whether Lucretius's version of the origin of language (5.1028–90) also expresses orthodox Epicurean teachings. Indeed, there are many details in the poet's account that are not explicitly mentioned in the summary of the *Epistle to Herodotus*, which could be either interpreted as novel additions, or as early arguments that were contained in Epicurus's *Περὶ φύσεως*.

The text may be divided in two main parts. In the first half (5.1028–40), Lucretius presents a positive short account of the origin of language that raises the following points absent from Epicurus's:

- (a) the natures of human beings generated the sounds of language, while need or utility (*utilitas*) formed the names of things (5.1029–30);
- (b) proof of this spontaneous power to communicate is its display by babies. We observe that, well before learning to name objects, they are compelled by a need to communicate with unarticulated sounds accompanied by gestures,<sup>59</sup> just like animals that already naturally attack and defend themselves, well before their natural *media* (horns, teeth, etc.) are formed (5.1031–40).<sup>60</sup>

In the second half (5.1041–90), Lucretius develops a negative argument, confuting the opinion that language was the invention of a single individual who taught names to others (as in Plat. *Crat.* 388b13–390e4). Here we find four counter-arguments, all absent from Epicurus:

- (c) it is absurd to believe that only a single man and not a multitude was capable of referring to things with sounds/names (5.1041–45). Presumably, the implicit reason is that a power of signification is easily observable in simple beings, like babies in point (b) above.
- (d) the notion (*notitia*) of *utilitas* that is the first cause of the formation of names, cf. (a), could not have been formed without the prior existence of language. This man could not have then wished to

- teach it to others, because it is through the communication with others that the concept of “language” itself is formed (5.1046–49);
- (e) it would have been impossible for a single individual to gather (*cogere*)<sup>61</sup> a multitude and to teach them to talk. For such a multitude would not have understood the command to stand still and learn, and they would have found it painful to hear for a long time incomprehensible sounds (5.1050–55);
  - (f) the ability to begin to utter sounds and to vary them requires no teaching of a superior individual. Even animals show a similar capacity, while responding to external environment (5.1056–98).

Now, points (b) and (f) can in my opinion be safely ascribed to Epicurus, thanks to the parallel source of Proclus, who says that Epicurus compared the origins of the first verbal utterances or the first attempts at communication to animal behavior,<sup>62</sup> which is what Lucretius reports. Arguments (c), (d), and (e) could also be traced back to Epicurus,<sup>63</sup> provided that one accepts the idea that they could be the products of the reflections of the first generation of the Epicurean school. It is during this time that reflection on the notion of a first inventor of language and other *technai* was introduced. Metrodorus attacked this belief, while Hermarchus recognized that some first inventors did exist, e.g. the lawgivers that convinced the less intelligent members of the community to recognize the utility of justice.<sup>64</sup> Finally, the reference to the formation of names from *utilitas*, cf. (a) and (d), although not explicit in the *Epistle to Herodotus*, may have been implicit for Epicurus. Such utility could correspond to the need of developing clearer and more concise names in order to improve communication, that in turn may have been necessary for making social contracts and other useful means for daily necessities. If this is true, then the appearance of *utilitas* may coincide with the conventionalist phase of *Ep. Hdt.* 76, which otherwise would be completely absent from Lucretius’s passage.<sup>65</sup> The belief that the notion of “language” itself could have derived only when language was already formed agrees instead with the doctrine of *πρόληψις*.<sup>66</sup> Nothing precludes, after all, that it was the repeated experience of communication that formed this notion and stored it in memory.

Where linguistic doctrines are concerned, *De rerum natura* seems to present nothing particularly different from Epicurus. If we now move to

Lucretius's method of writing, however, we may find two reflections that Epicurus could not have developed; hence they must spring from Lucretius's personal convictions or goals.

The first is the problem of translating Greek into Latin. This is obviously a problem that only an Epicurean poet who addresses a Roman audience could have posited. Lucretius notices that new words (*nova verba*) are required, because the subject of his poem is new and the current Latin vocabulary is too poor for accomplishing the task with success (1.136–39, 3.258–61). It is this requirement that probably induces the poet to find corresponding Latin words for some Greek expressions, or at least good paraphrases.<sup>67</sup> Here, the search for preconception seems not to be involved. What is at stake is only the practical task of an Epicurean who is forced to spread Greek Epicureanism in a different historical context.

A second point that might appear to be a personal Lucretian innovation is the reflection on poetry as a form of deliberate falsehood. I am thinking here of the digression (2.655–60) that follows the myth of the *Magna Mater*. Lucretius writes that a poet is allowed to use language in the wrong way, i.e. to do violence to a word (2.656: *nomine abuti*) and to its common meaning, for example by calling wine “Bacchus,” provided that he practices this linguistic “game” with extreme caution. Many verses of *De rerum natura* fortunately hint at the proper use of improper deliberate poetic falsehood, by giving the right explanation. Calling the earth “mother” is of course per se a form of linguistic violence. But since he is careful in making clear that it is just a poetic way of referring to earth's power to give birth to/nourish things and not an explicit recognition that this element is alive, nor a goddess (2.646–654, 2.991–998, 5.783–825), Lucretius plays the game of poetry without falling into scientific absurdities or harmful superstitions.

One may of course doubt the cogency of this method. If it is so dangerous, would it not be better to entirely avoid poetry? I believe that Lucretius's procedures can be saved by remembering that poetic diction is like the honey that helps one to drink the bitter hemlock of Epicurean philosophy.<sup>68</sup> If Romans heard that earth alone can give birth and nourish everything without the help of a divine living being, then they would feel scared by Epicureanism and return to their ancestral customs. If the same message is in fact conveyed with poetic touch, namely with references to the *Magna Mater*, they would more gladly hear Epicurean teachings and,

little by little, might be finally brought to renounce the same superstitions that they previously held.

It is in this original description of poetry as deliberate falsehood that one finds probably the only doctrinal addition of Lucretius that creates some tensions with Epicureanism. It is true that many scholars have successfully argued that Greek Epicureans were not totally hostile to poetry and allowed one to listen/practice it with caution.<sup>69</sup> But the concession of doing violence to the meaning of words would have been implicitly avoided by them through their theory of preconceptions, or their belief that one must not play with divine names. In this respect, therefore, the only significant philosophical innovation of Lucretius may actually be regarded as a non-Epicurean element in his all-Epicurean discourse.

## THE METHOD KAT' A ΔΙΪΛΗΨΙΝ IN DEMETRIUS LACO AND PHILODEMUS

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Moving now to Demetrius Laco and Philodemus, we will confirm once more that their basic beliefs follow the traditional teachings of their school. Indeed, the former recognized the natural origin of names in line with Epicurus and Lucretius. And although Demetrius never mentions the conventionalist phase, one probable reason is that the recognition occurs in the context of a definition of what “natural” means.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, both Demetrius and Philodemus continue to search for preconceptions of words by referring to common parlance, or to attack those philosophers who “play” with terms and their supposed etymologies, thus deriving many absurd conclusions.<sup>71</sup> However, as with Hermarchus, their orthodoxy did not preclude them from developing the theory of the master, or, at the very least, introducing some technical innovations.

One of these is found in Jacob Mackey’s new evidence about Philodemus’s view of the origin of poetry in Book 5 of *On Poems*. The Epicurean concluded that it “came to mankind because of emulation of people employing expressions in new ways for new benefits.”<sup>72</sup> This evidence gives ample confirmation of what scholars could only conjecture before this discovery, namely that poetry appears in the conventionalist



stage of the origin of language described in Epic. *Ep. Hdt.* 75–76.<sup>73</sup> Philodemus seems to argue that poets emulated people who introduced new words and by doing so benefited the community. It is probably a reference especially to the wise men who, by revising the ambiguities of common parlance, found the *φθόγγοι* underlying the preconceptions that enable us to make the inquiries leading to well-being.<sup>74</sup>

More important, however, is another technical detail that is introduced at the time of Demetrius and Philodemus. This is the analysis of the meaning of words with a method of separation (*κατὰ διάληψιν*). This expression, moreover, only occurs in the terminology of this generation of Epicureans. Indeed, the potential exception of Galen’s commentary on Hippocrates’s *On Fractures* (vol. 18, p. 542 K.) is a misspelling of the original Hippocratic phrase *κατὰ διάλειψιν* (*De fract.* 25; cf. also Galen *De praen. ad Epig.* vol. 14, p. 671 K.). And in any case, the text talks of a method of surgery.

Now, if we look at *κατὰ διάληψιν* in Demetrius and Philodemus, we may notice that for Philodemus it expresses the method of studying something specifically (*Rhet.* II, *P.Herc.* 1674, col. 53.25–34; II, *P.Herc.* 1672, col. 21.1–5). In the *De ira*, Philodemus also opposes it to the practice of speaking *κατὰ συμπλοκήν* (col. 37.17–32). Contrary to *κατὰ διάληψιν*, this expression has other Greek parallels, especially in logical contexts. Before Philodemus, it occurs in Aristotle’s *Categories* (1a16–19) and in Chrysippus (*SVF* II 381 = Galen. *Inst. log.* 4) to denote a conjunction between a subject and a predicate, such as “Dion walks” or “Socrates sits.” In this passage of the *De ira*, we may then suppose that *κατὰ διάληψιν* is opposed to *κατὰ συμπλοκήν* because the former tries to study what a specific word indicates without referring to particular individuals, while the latter does the contrary. Indeed, Philodemus claims here—against those who say that “wrath” indicates only a bad or only a good emotion—that a proper use of our language shows that the problem is far more complex. If we describe the passion separately (*κατὰ διάληψιν*) from specific individuals, we will conclude that it is painful and damaging, hence an evil. But if we speak of it in conjunction (*κατὰ συμπλοκήν*) with a person’s specific moral disposition (*διάθεσις*: coll. 37.29–38.43), it could be inferred that it is a good. For some individuals know how to liberate it in a “natural” and useful way.<sup>75</sup> With some caution, we may add that a description *κατὰ συμπλοκήν* may anticipate the sixth trope of Hermogenes’s *Περὶ στάσεων*



(1.5), which consists in the practice of connecting a person with a thing or experience (τὰ κατὰ συμπλοκὴν προσώπου καὶ πράγματος).

Demetrius's use of κατὰ διάληψιν appears only in *P.Herc.* 1012 (coll. 63–64), within his reply to some unknown adversaries who tried to refute Epicurus by accusing him of inconsistencies (col. 59). Apparently, one of the refutations concerned the Master's linguistic explanation of ἀναπνοή (= “respiration” in general), as a synonym of ἐίσπνοή (= only “inhalation”). Demetrius's defense consists in noticing that this practice is consistent, if one recognizes the preconceptions of the terms employed by Epicurus and, more important, through the κατὰ διάληψιν method, the specific senses that these terms assume in context.<sup>76</sup> In Greek, ἀναπνοή can mean indifferently “respiration,” or “exhalation,” or “inhaling.” Epicurus is then consistent, because he is using the word specifically in the third sense. As a further proof, Demetrius quotes briefly from Empedocles's description of respiration (col. 65),<sup>77</sup> where ἀναπνέω (here meaning “to exhale”) is used consistently as a synonym of ἐκπνέω (just “to exhale”). These columns show then that the κατὰ διάληψιν method consists in separating from the many senses that a word could have the specific one that best fits the context.

Three problems are raised by this analysis. The first is to decide whether the κατὰ διάληψιν method and its opposition to a κατὰ συμπλοκὴν description can be traced back to Epicurus, or if it is an invention of Philodemus and Demetrius. I believe that the solution is in the middle. Philodemus and Demetrius—but especially the latter, who probably revived the practice of dialectic division that was rejected by the first generation of the school<sup>78</sup>—expressed more technically what was already contained *in nuce* in Epicurus, who after all sanctioned the awareness of difference (διάληψις) in one's vocabulary (*De nat.* 28, fr. 13, col. 7.5–10 inf.).

The second problem concerns the relationship of the specific senses of words with their preconception. Are the former contained in the latter, or are they different? Enzo Puglia supposes that the preconception is the “accezione primaria e fondamentale di un vocabolo,” while its specific sense grasped with the κατὰ διάληψιν method is “una delle sue accezioni secondarie.”<sup>79</sup> I believe that he is right and that his hypothesis could be further confirmed by Philodemus's *On Poems* Book 5.<sup>80</sup> Here, a preconception is considered as a genus or common element of all the

particular things to which the word “poetry” could refer. If we apply this discourse to Demetrius, we could suppose that “respiration” is the preconception or generic meaning of *ἀναπνοή*, while “inhalation” and “exhalation” correspond to the specific senses that it assumes depending on the context.

The third problem is whether Philodemus's and Demetrius's versions of the *κατὰ διάληψιν* method agree with each other. At first sight, it seems not. Philodemus employs *κατὰ διάληψιν* for describing the grasp of the meaning of a word without referring to a particular subject, while Demetrius resorts to it for abstracting the precise sense of a term. The former abstracts then a more generic sense, the latter a more specific one. However, this apparent contradiction can be solved by supposing that the *κατὰ διάληψιν* method can work in both directions. It could equally abstract from the genus to its species, or move up from the species to their genus. Philodemus and Demetrius do not then contradict each other: they complete each other's perspective.

# **DIODECIES OF OENOANDA AND DIOGENIANUS ON LANGUAGE**

Finally, two brief comments can be made about the use of Epicurus's analysis of language in two final Epicureans, Diogenes of Oenoanda and Diogenianus.

The former covers the topic in three fragments (frr. 12, 23, NF 192).<sup>81</sup> Frr. 23 and NF 192 are not especially interesting. Respectively, they just attack the ambiguous utterances of oracular sayings and argue that disagreement about the idea that pleasure is the good—including the one between Cyrenaics, Stoics, and Epicureans—depends on the fact that often the name “pleasure” is used in the wrong way by the non-Epicurean parties, namely without attaching to it the meaning given by its *πρόληψις*.<sup>82</sup> Fr. 12 contains, however, two little points of importance. On the one hand, it confirms directly the hypothesis sustained earlier that *φθόγγοι* include names and phrases.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, it presents a polemic against the so-called first inventors of language that differs from Lucretius’s version

(cf. §12.3) in the following respect. Diogenes extends the Epicurean attack to the idea that language is the product of a god, probably using as an objection the recovery of Epicurus's argument that learning an art or capacity requires both a need and time (cf. coll. 2.6–11 and 3.4–8 with *Ep. Hdt.* 75). Secondly, he presents in much more detail Lucretius's argument that a man could not have gathered others to teach them to talk if they did not already possess the power of understanding speech and an ability to speak (5.1050–55). Diogenes adds that its impossibility rests on the fact that at that time there were no kings<sup>84</sup> who could gather the subjects with a public decree, nor was there writing. The existence of either presupposes, after all, the existence of language (coll. 3.9–5.14). Once again, this more detailed version could be traced back to the time of Epicurus, especially because the criticism of the gods as name-givers was already moved by Plato's *Cratylus* (425d3–9); that writing teaches a large audience at once could have been made explicit by Diogenes, however, because he attributed this same function to his inscriptions (frr. 2–3).

As regards Diogenianus, nothing of importance can be added to the still fundamental article of Hammerstaedt. He demonstrated how Epicurus's method of recognizing preconceptions underlying the utterances we make is still active in this Epicurean.<sup>85</sup> The only thing that is worth mentioning is the anti-Stoic application of this idea in fr. 2 (*SVF* II 914 = Euseb. *PE* VI 8.8–23), that appears to be a novel feature.<sup>86</sup> Diogenianus asks Chrysippus, who concludes that some commonly used names demonstrate a belief in an almighty destiny, if his position is really consistent with itself and with other Stoic claims. Indeed, if those *ὀνόματα* were established by the irrational mass of humankind, then he must renounce his idea that they express something true, since only the wise man knows truth (*SVF* III 548–50); or he must admit that knowledge could be possessed by non-wise men. If, however, such names were established by σοφοί, Chrysippus still needs demonstration. One could object that those *ὀνόματα* prove not the dominion of destiny, but of the natural law that everything happens for a cause.

## CONCLUSIONS

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It is possible to draw two general conclusions about the Epicurean theory of language, one philosophical, the other historical. It seems safe to infer that almost all Epicureans always respected the core of Epicurus's philosophy. None ever denied that language is the dialectical outcome of the natural influence of the environment and a conventionalist phase, even though later Epicureans concentrated more on the former; nor did they deny that one must try to recognize the evident preconceptions or common meaning underlined in words. The only exception consists in Lucretius's admission of breaking some linguistic customs or the true meanings of names (especially the divine ones) while writing poetry. Even this divergence, however, may be interpreted as the compromise of an Epicurean poet with a philosophy generally hostile to poetic diction, rather than a divorce from Epicureanism itself.

From the historical point of view, it is clear that Epicureans did not simply repeat what Epicurus had taught them. They actually tried to refine his teachings and to defend them from the objections of their adversaries. This appears especially true for Hermarchus, Philodemus, and Demetrius, who introduced technical innovations that do not contradict but strengthen Epicurus's teachings. In this sense, the famous claims of Seneca and Numenius of Apamea that the Epicureans refer everything they say to the beliefs of their Master<sup>87</sup> is partly true, but also partly false. Its truth lies in the fact that even the most innovative additions are fitted to Epicurus's ancient perspective; its falsity lies, perhaps, in the clear recognition that an innovation is the product of original and personal thinking.

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<sup>1</sup> Atherton, “Epicurean Philosophy of Language,” 198–99.

<sup>2</sup> Long, “*Aisthesis, Prolepsis* and Linguistic Theory in Epicurus”; Glidden, “Epicurean Semantics,” “Epicurean *prolēpsis*,” “Epicurean thought.” Further literature on the debate is quoted and discussed in [the next section](#). Here I present just a general synthesis.

<sup>3</sup> The present essay uses abbreviations. Those that are not readily understandable and appear just once in the essay are immediately followed by the full reference in a footnote. The other more quoted but less known abbreviations should instead be interpreted as follows: Emped. DK = Empedocles, *Fragments*, ed. Diels-Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*; Emped. LM = Empedocles, *Fragments*, ed. Laks-Most, *Early Greek Philosophy. Volume V*; Diog. Oen. fr. Smith = Diogenes of Oenoanda, *Fragments*, ed. Smith, *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription*; Epic. *De nat.* =

Epicurus, *On Nature*; Epic. fr. Arr.<sup>2</sup> = Epicurus, *Fragments*, ed. Arrighetti, *Epicuro: Opere*; Epic. fr. Usener = Epicurus, *Fragments*, ed. Usener, *Epicurea*; Epic. RS = Epicurus, *Ratae Sententiae*, ed. Arrighetti, *Epicuro: Opere*; Hermarch. = Hermarchus, *Fragments*, in Longo Auricchio, *Ermarco. Frammenti*; P.Herc. x = Herculaneum papyrus no. x; Philod. *De ira* = Philodemus, *On Wrath*, ed. Indelli, *Filodemo. L'ira*; Philod. *De piet.* = Philodemus, *On Piety*, ed. Obbink, *Philodemus. On Piety, Part I*; Philod. *Oec.* = Philodemus, *On Property Management*, ed. Tsouna, *Philodemus: On Property Management*; Philod. *Rhet. II* = Philodemus, *Rhetoric*, Book II, ed. Longo Auricchio “Φιλοδήμου Περὶ ῥητορικῆς libros primum et secundum”; SVF = *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Verde, *Epicuro: Epistola a Erodoto*, 77–78, for references and analysis.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Ep. Hdt.* 40 and 86 with Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.101; Glidden, “Epicurean Semantics,” 205.

<sup>6</sup> For further clarifications, cf. Long, “Aisthesis, Prolepsis and Linguistic Theory in Epicurus,” 119–22; Manuwald, *Die Prolepsislehre Epikurs*, 4–10, 95–102; Asmis, *Epicurus’ Scientific Method*, 24–34; Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, 167–70; Striker, “Κριτήριο τῆς ἀληθείας,” 37–42; Morel, “Method and Evidence: On the Epicurean Preconception,” 29–48; Verde, *Epicuro: Epistola a Erodoto*, 78–83 and “Percezione, errore e residuo percettivo in Aristotele, Epicuro e Alessandro di Afrodisia,” 50–62; Fine, *The Possibility of Inquiry*, 226–45. On the relationship between πρόληψις and ἐπιβολή, which are not two identical criteria of truth (cf. indeed DL 10.31), cf. however Glidden, “Epicurean prolepsis,” 194–98 and Hammerstaedt, “Il ruolo della πρόληψις epicurea nell’interpretazione di Epicuro, *Epistula ad Herodotum* 37 sg.,” 234–37; Morel, “Method and Evidence: On the Epicurean Preconception,” 39–47; Konstan, *Lucrezio e la psicologia epicurea*, 53–54; Verde, *Epicuro nella testimonianza di Cicerone*, 350–57.

<sup>7</sup> See SE M 8.13 and 258; Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1119f2–1120a2 (= fr. 259 Usener); Glidden, “Epicurean Semantics,” 185–87.

<sup>8</sup> Glidden, “Epicurean Semantics,” 192–99, 222–24. Citations are on pp. 195 and 222. Cf. also Glidden, “Epicurean prolepsis,” 180–212. Similar observations were already in de Lacy, “The Epicurean Analysis of Language,” and recur also in Everson, “Epicurus on Mind and Language,” 80–87; Atherton, “Epicurean Philosophy of Language,” 200–201; Németh, *Epicurus on the Self*, 30–43.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Jäkel, “Philosophisch orientierte Ansätze einer Sprachtheorie bei Gorgias, Isokrates und Epikur,” 47–55; Mitsis, “Commentary on Glidden,” 448–49; Everson, “Epicurus on Mind and Language,” 81–83; Hammerstaedt “Il ruolo della πρόληψις epicurea nell’interpretazione di Epicuro, *Epistula ad Herodotum* 37 sg.,” 227–37; Fine, *The Possibility of Inquiry*, 242–45.

<sup>10</sup> Pace Glidden, “Epicurean prolepsis,” 199–205.

<sup>11</sup> The human mind can indeed only perceive the basic properties of god (anthropomorphism, blessedness, immortality). Everything else has to be checked through reasoning. For references on Epicurean theology, cf. the essay of Spinelli and Verde published in this same collection and Piergiacomini, *Storia delle antiche teologie atomiste*, 50–72 and 152–62.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Philod. *De piet.* col. 66A.1885–1887.

<sup>13</sup> Verde, “*Rebus ab ipsis consequitur sensus*”; Goeury, “L’absence de préconception du temps chez Épicure.”

<sup>14</sup> Further proofs in Barnes, “Epicurus: Meaning and Thinking”; Everson, “Epicurus on Mind and Language,” 85–91; Hammerstaedt, “Il ruolo della πρόληψις epicurea nell’interpretazione di Epicuro, *Epistula ad Herodotum* 37 sg.,” 229; Morel, “Method and Evidence: On the Epicurean Preconception,” 33–34.

<sup>15</sup> Fine, *The Possibility of Inquiry*, 235–37.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Giannantoni, “Epicurei e Stoici sul linguaggio,” 268 on Lucr. 4.722–48.

<sup>17</sup> Atherton, "Epicurean Philosophy of Language," 206, argues the same with the example of the Fury, which "would amount to no more than a belief that this is what a Fury looks like, with no built-in commitment to the image's representing a three-dimensional continuant."

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Everson, "Epicurus on Mind and Language," 103–106.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Ep. Hdt.* 64–68; Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, 148–51; Verde, *Epicuro: Epistola a Erodoto*, 190–92.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Philod. *De sign.* col. 34.5–9 (ed. de Lacy and de Lacy, *Philodemus. On Methods of Inference*); and Lucr. *DRN* 1.304, 5.152.

<sup>21</sup> Some scholars actually think there are three stages: a natural phase and two conventionalist moments, one of which determines the origin of names of normal objects and the other the birth of names of more complex entities. On this debate, cf. Verde, *Epicuro*, 141–46.

<sup>22</sup> Everson, "Epicurus on Mind and Language," 92–98; Verlinsky, "Epicurus and His Predecessors on the Origin of Language," 65–71; Konstan, *Lucrezio e la psicologia epicurea*, 126–27; Reinhardt, "Epicurus and Lucretius on the Origins of Language," 130; Verde, *Epicuro: Epistola a Erodoto*, 142–44.

<sup>23</sup> All this is demonstrated by Verlinsky, "Epicurus and His Predecessors on the Origin of Language," 71–83.

<sup>24</sup> On the topic, cf. especially Pigeaud, "Épicure et Lucrèce et l'origine du langage."

<sup>25</sup> Pigeaud, "Épicure et Lucrèce et l'origine du langage," 128–35; Verde, *Epicuro*, 143.

<sup>26</sup> DL 10.13 (= fr. 404 Slater, *Aristophanis Byzantii Fragmenta*); Arrighetti, "Epicuro, la *κυρία λέξις* e i *πράγματα*," 19–21. Cf. also Acosta Méndez, "Diogenes Laertius X 14,1–2."

<sup>27</sup> From now on, I refer, both in the principal text and in footnotes, to the edition and translation of Sedley, "Epicurus, *On Nature*, Book XXVIII." For the second point, cf. Leone, "Rileggendo il XXVIII libro *Della natura* di Epicuro: riflessioni e proposte."

<sup>28</sup> He allowed the use of this only in exceptional cases. Cf. Book 28, fr. 8, col. 5; and Long, "Aisthesis, Prolepsis and Linguistic Theory in Epicurus," 124–26.

<sup>29</sup> Fr. 38.2–3 Arr.<sup>2</sup> (the number of the book has been recognized by Del Mastro, "A proposito del *Περὶ φύσεως* di Epicuro").

<sup>30</sup> I follow the conjecture of Leone, "La chiusa del XIV libro *Della natura* di Epicuro," 58, n. 78.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. fr. 34.20 Arr.<sup>2</sup>, now edited by Laursen, "The Later Parts of Epicurus, *On Nature*, 25th Book," 16–17.

<sup>32</sup> Fr. 13, coll. 5 and 9.11. On the opponents of Epicurus, cf. Leone, "La chiusa del XIV libro *Della natura* di Epicuro," 67–76.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *De nat.* Book 14, col. 43 (ed. Leone, "Epicuro, *Della natura*, libro XIV") with Leone, "La chiusa del XIV libro *Della natura* di Epicuro," 57–66 and "Questioni di terminologia filosofica," 250–52.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Book 2, coll. 118–19 (ed. Leone, *Epicuro: Sulla natura. Libro II*, 677–84), with Atherton, "Epicurean Philosophy of Language," 212–13. Another example is Epicurus's letter published in *P.Oxy.* LXXVII 5077, fr. 2, col. 2 (ed. Angeli, "Lettere di Epicuro dall'Egitto (POxy. LXXVI 5077)"), where the philosopher invites us to recognize the different meaning that the term *σχημα* shows when it is applied to Socrates (= his physical form), or to justice (= its structure).

<sup>35</sup> Fr. 12, col. 3.6–9. Cf. here Sedley, "Epicurus, *On Nature*, Book XXVIII," 22–23.

<sup>36</sup> I agree with the point made by Glidden, "Prolepsis in *Peri physeos* XXVIII fr. 12 III 3–14," not with his conclusions.

<sup>37</sup> I recur to fr. 13 (coll. 6.8 inf.–7.5 sup.; coll. 7.5 inf.–9.11 sup.) and to Sedley, "Epicurus, *On Nature*, Book XXVIII," 23–33 and 65–68.

<sup>38</sup> Goldschmidt, *La doctrine d'Épicure et le droit*, 208–37.

<sup>39</sup> For tests of beliefs in general, cf. Striker, “Κριτήριον τῆς ἀληθείας,” 42–51.

<sup>40</sup> Sedley, “Epicurus, *On Nature*, Book XXVIII,” 21–23.

<sup>41</sup> Tepedino Guerra, “Il contributo di Metrodoro di Lampsaco alla formazione della teoria epicurea del linguaggio,” 24–25 supposes that it could have been his lost *Πρὸς τοὺς Διαλεκτικούς* (fr. 4). This and successive fragments are collected in Körte, *Metrodori Epicurei Fragmenta*.

<sup>42</sup> Tepedino Guerra, “Il contributo di Metrodoro di Lampsaco alla formazione della teoria epicurea del linguaggio,” 17.

<sup>43</sup> Fr. 13 and 16 = Philod. *Oec.* coll. 22.9–24.28 *partim*. Cf. here Tsouna, “Epicurean Attitudes to Management and Finance,” 703–10; and Tepedino Guerra, “Metrodoro ἀγαθὸς οἰκονόμος. Rileggendo Philod., *Oec.* coll. XIV 23–XV 21 (*PHerc.* 1424).”

<sup>44</sup> *P.Herc.* 57 col. 3 (ed. Tepedino Guerra, “Un frammento di Metrodoro di Lampsaco (*P.Herc.* 57, col. 3)”).

<sup>45</sup> Fr. 64 = Philod. *De ira* col. 43.5–25, Epic. fr. 8 Arr.<sup>2</sup>, Hermarch. fr. 43.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. coll. 2–5 (ed. Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemos*, 163–70); Alesse, “La polemica di Colote contro il ‘socratico’ Menedemo,” 101–106.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. coll. 24.8–29.1 and 32.14–33.21 of the treatise *De contemptu* (ed. Indelli, *Polistrato: Sul disprezzo irrazionale delle opinioni popolari*).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. the references in Longo Auricchio, “Osservazioni e precisazioni su Ermarco,” 11–12, who also gives a new edition and commentary of fr. 29 (= Philod. *De piet.* coll. 19.542–20.554).

<sup>49</sup> Emped. 31 A 33 and B 6 DK = LM 22 D56–57.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Ep. Hdt.* 77, fr. 392 Usener (= Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1119d9–e8); Cic. *ND* 1.13.32; Philod. *De piet.* col. 19.533–541 (= Epic. fr. 27.2 Arr.<sup>2</sup> *partim*, Antisthenes, *SSR* V A 79, ed. Giannantoni, *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae*), with Verde, *Epicuro: Epistola a Erodoto*, 222; Obbink, *Philodemus. On Piety, Part I*, 359–63.

<sup>51</sup> Fr. 32 = Philod. *De dis* III, coll. 13.20–14.13.

<sup>52</sup> Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Philosophy*, 62–93.

<sup>53</sup> Sasso, *Il progresso e la morte*, 31–40.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. 4.1049–60. The derivation of *amor* from *umor* is just one of the many proofs that Lucretius holds “a theory that relationship between substances was naturally reflected in relationship between words,” according to Ferguson, “Epicurean Language-theory and Lucretian Practice,” 100.

<sup>55</sup> For ancient references and bibliography, see Warren, “Psychic Disharmony: Philoponus and Epicurus on Plato’s *Phaedo*”; and Piergiacomini, “Corpo divino e musicale. La negazione ‘estetica’ dell’anima tra IV e I secolo a.C.”

<sup>56</sup> Cf. the texts of fr. 314–15 Usener and *Ep. Hdt.* 63. Here Epicurus recognizes a fine element. It is true that the philosopher does not mention it in his summary of the *Ep. Hdt.* But this may be a later development of Epicurus’s psychology (cf. Verde, *Monismo psicologico e dottrina dell’anima in Lucrezio ed Epicuro*).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Aristotle’s *On Philosophy*, ap. Cic. *Tusc.* 1.10.22, 17.41 (= fr. 994–95 Gigon, *Aristoteles*) and, e.g., Aristot. *APo* 1.74a9–10, *Mete.* IV 379b14–20, *Po.* 1447a28–b9.

<sup>58</sup> For another interpretation, cf. Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, 139–40.

<sup>59</sup> I completely agree here with Sasso, *Il progresso e la morte*, 94–95; Verlinsky, “Epicurus and His Predecessors on the Origin of Language,” 86–90; Konstan, *Lucrezio e la psicologia epicurea*, 123–25; Reinhardt, “Epicurus and Lucretius on the Origins of Language,” 134–35.

<sup>60</sup> On the spontaneity of language learning, cf. Schrijvers, “L’origine du langage (*DRN* V 1019–1090).”

<sup>61</sup> I follow Verlinsky, “The Epicureans against the ‘First Inventors’: Lucr. V, 1041–1055;” Diog. Oen. fr. 12 Smith; Sext. Emp. Adv. math. IX, 30–33,” 309–10. *Contra* Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex*, 3.1493.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *In Plat. Crat.* 17 (= fr. 335 Usener): ὥς οἱ βήσσοντες καὶ παῖροντες καὶ μυκόμενοι καὶ ὕλακτοῦντες καὶ στενάζοντες. On the historical trustworthiness of the source, cf. Campbell, *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution: A Commentary on De rerum natura 5.772–1104*, 311; Mackey, “New Evidence for the Epicurean Theory of the Origin of Language,” 82. *Contra* Atherton, “Lucretius on What Language Is Not,” 121–25.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. already Reinhardt, “Epicurus and Lucretius on the Origins of Language,” 138–39.

<sup>64</sup> For Metrodorus, cf. his *Πρὸς τοὺς Διαλεκτικούς* published in *P.Herc.* 255, fr. 1 (ed. Spinelli, “Metrodoro contro i dialettici?”), according however to the *disegno* of Janko, *New Fragments of Epicurus*, 56–57. For Hermarchus, fr. 34 (= Porph. Abst. I 8.1–11.1) with at least Vander Waerdt, “Hermarchus and the Epicurean Genealogy of Morals.”

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Giussani, *Studi lucreziani*, 280–83; and Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex*, 3.1488–1490.

<sup>66</sup> *Notitia* might indeed be the Latin translation of this Greek word. Cf. Sasso, *Il progresso e la morte*, 102–103; Costa, *Lucretius: De rerum natura V*, 121–22; Campbell, *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution: A Commentary on De rerum natura 5.772–1104*, 294–97; Atherton, “Lucretius on What Language Is Not,” 129–35; Verlinsky, “Epicurus and His Predecessors on the Origin of Language,” 90–98.

<sup>67</sup> For some examples, cf., e.g., 1.449–58, 1.830–33, 2.629, 3.314–20, 4.45–53, 6.323–25, 6.701–702, 6.738–55, 6.906–909; and Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Philosophy*, 50–57.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. 1.935–50 with Mitsis, “Committing Philosophy on the Reader.”

<sup>69</sup> Cf., e.g., the essays collected in Obbink, *Philodemus and Poetry*.

<sup>70</sup> *P.Herc.* 1012, coll. 64–66. I follow here and henceforth the edition of Puglia, *Demetrio Lacone. Aporie testuali ed esegetiche in Epicuro* (*P.Herc.* 1012).

<sup>71</sup> For Demetrius, cf. *De poem.* II coll. 36–37 and 44 (ed. Romeo, *Demetrio Lacone: La poesia*). For Philodemus, cf. *Rhet.* II, *P.Herc.* 1674, coll. 18.29–19.21, 32.2–15, and 42.8–43.26 with Chandler, “References to ‘Common Parlance’ in Philodemus’ *Rhetorica* Book II,” and *Philodemus: On Rhetoric, Books 1 and 2*, 81–103; *De div.* I col. 49.5–12–39 (ed. Tepedino Guerra, “Il primo libro *Sulla ricchezza* di Filodemo”), *De ira* col. 43, *Oec.* coll. 4–6, 20.1–21.35, *De mus.* IV coll. 61.27–45, 74.26–76.18, 118.36–119.10, 129.15–44 (ed. Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara. Sur la musique. Livre IV*).

<sup>72</sup> Text, edition, and translation of fr. 5, col. 1, *P.Herc.* 403 = Mackey, “New Evidence for the Epicurean Theory of the Origin of Language,” 76–83.

<sup>73</sup> Obbink, “Epicurus on the Origin of Poetry in Human History,” esp. 686–95.

<sup>74</sup> Mackey, “New Evidence for the Epicurean Theory of the Origin of Language,” 82–83 adds the elaboration of legal and social terminology.

<sup>75</sup> For confirmation that κατὰ συμπλοκὴν means the conjunction with something specific, cf. *De sign.* col. 37.4 (συμπλοκὴν ἔχειν ἰδίαν), *De poem.*, *Tractatus Tertius*, fr. b, col. 2.12–13 (ed. Sbordone, “Φιλοδήμου Περὶ ποιημάτων tractatus tres”: συνπλεγόμενων τῷ ἰδίῳ). For the concept of διάθεσις and the transformation of wrath into a good thing, cf. Grilli, “ΔΙΑΘΕΣΙΣ in Epicuro.”

<sup>76</sup> Puglia, *Demetrio Lacone*, 91–93 and 290–91.

<sup>77</sup> Emped. 31 B 100.1–2 DK = LM 22 D 201a–b.

<sup>78</sup> Cic. *Fin.* 2.6.18 (= fr. 69 Usener); S.E. *M.* 10.219–27; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.101.

<sup>79</sup> Puglia, *Demetrio Lacone*, 293.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. col. 30.25–33, ed. Mangoni, *Filodemo*, with the commentary *ad loc.*

<sup>81</sup> “NF” is an abbreviation for the new fragments edited by Hammerstaedt and Smith, *The Epicurean Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda*.

<sup>82</sup> I accept the interpretation of NF 192 given by Taylor, “Diogenes of Oinoanda on the Meaning of ‘Pleasure’ (NF 192).” For the polemic of Diogenes against Stoicism and Cyrenaics, cf. now Masi, “Virtue, Pleasure, and Cause”; and Tsouna, “Diogenes of Oinoanda and the Cyrenaics.”

<sup>83</sup> Cf. col. 2.11–14: τῶν φθόνγων . . . λέγω δὲ τῶν τε ὀνομάτων καὶ τῶν ῥημάτων.

<sup>84</sup> Actually the word βασιλῆες is an uncertain reading. For its defense, cf. Chilton, “The Epicurean Theory of the Origin of Language. A Study of Diogenes of Oenoanda, Fragments X and XI (W),” 164–65.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. fr. 4 (= Euseb. *PE* VI 3.6) and Hammerstaedt, “Das Kriterium der Prolepsis beim Epikureer Diogenianus.” Diogenianus’s fragments are collected by Gercke, “Chrysippea.”

<sup>86</sup> The polemic against Stoicism was begun only after Epicurus. Cf. Kechagia, “Rethinking a Professional Rivalry.”

<sup>87</sup> Sen. *Ep.* 33.4, Euseb. *PE* XIV 5.3 (= Numenius, fr. 23 des Places, *Numenius. Fragments*).



## CHAPTER 13

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# RHETORIC

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## CLIVE CHANDLER

IN 155 BCE a delegation of philosophers arrived from Athens to address an appeal to the Roman senate against an arbitration delivered by the city of Sicyon. The delegation included representatives from the Academy, Peripatos, and Stoa.<sup>1</sup> No one from the Epicurean School had been co-opted. We have no way of knowing whether the Epicurean scholar of the day had been invited and declined, but the omission is not surprising given the reputation and practice of the Epicurean School with respect to engagement in civic affairs. Epicurus had famously instructed his followers to “live unnoticed” (λάθῃ βιώσας), that is to refrain from all non-essential participation in the various institutions and offices which were part of civic life in Greek cities, particularly Athens.<sup>2</sup> Even before the time of Epicurus, and for centuries after him, any such participation required years of training in the art of public speaking, rhetoric. If Epicureans failed to see the importance of engagement in civic affairs, it is hardly likely that they would have allocated priority to expertise in the very medium of that engagement.

The practice of avoiding civic distinction provides a sound reason for Epicureans to avoid rhetoric, but when the Founders of the school sought to articulate their rejection of rhetoric they did not have to come up with arguments which were entirely new and original since they operated within



a tradition, or at least a collection of conceptual habits, established already by previous philosophers. In response to the increased professionalism and systematizing of expertise in rhetoric, and the claims made by its teachers and practitioners, philosophers in the decades before Epicurus had felt obliged to engage with the question of rhetoric's status as an art or science, its objectives, and its utility for life. The most significant and influential voices in this tradition were those of Plato and Aristotle, neither of whom advocated withdrawal from civic engagement. Plato conspicuously focused on the issue of rhetoric and its difference from philosophy in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*. In the *Gorgias* Socrates shows that rhetoric is not an effective science of political activity since it is at best a kind of knack for catering to the views of its audience. The rhetor fails to achieve his objective, if the objective is persuasion and to influence decisions and policy, since he is constrained by the opinions and desires of his audience, and can only reaffirm those opinions and desires, not change them or replace them with his own. While the *Phaedrus* acknowledges that rhetoric can have some sort of effect on an audience, the value and nature of that effect is called into question. Rhetoric in itself cannot provide the kind of knowledge which is required for a reliable appreciation of what needs to be said on a particular subject. Only a method which is philosophical (here entailing a process of collection and division) offers the discursive procedure which can serve to clarify a subject, and can thereby be truly persuasive. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates leaves open the possibility of a reformed procedure for delivering speeches, which one may wish to continue to label *rhetorikē*. Aristotle, on the other hand, explicitly acknowledges rhetoric's legitimacy by labeling it the "counterpart to dialectic" (*ἡ ῥητορική ἐστὶν ἀντίστροφος τῇ διαλεκτικῇ*, *Rh.* 1.1.1354a1) at the beginning of his three-book treatment of the art.<sup>3</sup> It emerges that, for Aristotle, rhetoric is to be classified as an art, that its objective is persuasion, and that it is useful for life. The options presented by these two thinkers to subsequent philosophers are therefore either a dismissal of rhetoric's status altogether, or an engagement with the discipline which leads to an accommodation of its claims, even if those claims are effectively adjusted or reformed.

As will become clear from a consideration of the ancient evidence for Epicurus's attitude towards rhetoric, Epicureans would seem to have more in common with Plato than Aristotle, but since Plato is not opposed to civic

participation as such but believes the philosopher is better equipped than the rhetor to provide leadership in this activity, there remains a significant distinction.

## THE RECEIVED ANCIENT OPINION ON EPICURUS'S ATTITUDE TO RHETORIC

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With the exception of one source (Philodemus) the reports on early Epicurean views on rhetoric are sparse but reasonably consistent. The Epicureans are represented as uncommitted to the value of the disciplines which constitute *paideia*, that is traditional education and culture (including poetry, music, rhetoric), and question the kinds of lifestyles and civic contexts in which expertise in these disciplines can be successfully applied.<sup>4</sup> Diogenes Laertius (10.6) preserves a piece of advice which Epicurus gave to Pythocles in a letter which is now lost, “launch your boat, blessed man, and keep avoiding education” (παιδείαν δὲ πᾶσαν, μακάριε, φεῦγε τᾰκάτιον ᾰράμενος). The allusion to the seductive and destructive song of the Sirens from Homer’s *Odyssey* is unmistakable.<sup>5</sup> traditional education has the potential to lead the Epicurean follower astray from his ultimate destination, the safe haven of philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

Epicurean hostility to *paideia* in general was so famous in antiquity that in a review of philosophical evaluations of rhetoric as an art Quintilian could dismiss Epicurean criticism of rhetoric as simply part of an unspecific avoidance of all learned disciplines (*Inst.* 2.17.15). Again, in addressing the question of which sect of philosophy can offer most aid to the budding orator, Quintilian remarks that it is *Epicurus* who has sent the orators away from *his* door (*Inst.* 12.2.24). While rhetoricians habitually accorded their art a pivotal role in the development and maintenance of organized society and civilization, Lucretius did not even include it in his catalog of arts and crafts in *DRN* 5.<sup>7</sup> This picture is confirmed by another anti-Epicurean source, Plutarch, who declares, “they [i.e. Epicureans] write about the formation of the city (περὶ πολιτείας), when they *do* write about it, in order that we do not take part in the affairs of the city, and about rhetoric in order that we do not make speeches in public (περὶ ῥητορικῆς ἵνα μὴ

ῥητορεύωμεν)” (Adv. Col. 1127a–b). Diogenes Laertius, who is sympathetic to Epicureanism, informs us that Epicurus composed a treatise *On Rhetoric*, but offers nothing about the content of this work except that it insisted on clarity (*saphēneia*) in speech: “he was so clear that even in his *On Rhetoric* he claims that he requires nothing other than clarity” (10.13). Several other statements pertaining to rhetoric are dispersed in the summary collection of injunctions and expectations for the wise man assembled by Diogenes. Thus we read, “he will not give fine speeches” (οὐδὲ ῥητορεύσειν καλῶς, 10.117), “he will plead his case in court; he will leave behind writings; but he will not deliver speeches at public festivals” (καὶ δικάσασθαι· καὶ συγγράμματα καταλείψειν· οὐ πανηγυριεῖν δέ, 10.120), “he will give readings in a crowd, but not voluntarily” (καὶ ἀναγνώσασθαι ἐν πλήθει, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ἐκόντα, 10.121b). We can only speculate as to the source of these statements, but they constitute a consistent stance in accordance with Epicurean principles. The wise man may not be able to avoid going to court and so may have to speak in that environment, but he is not obliged to give a fine or rhetorically elaborated speech. Already within this injunction we may detect the view that a rhetorically fine speech is not the surest means of securing success in a forensic context. So too, taking a leading role in a public festival is a matter of choice, and one the wise man should not make. There is a clear avoidance of public performance before large audiences,<sup>8</sup> with some compromise in the case of public readings (presumably of the kind of works which will benefit the audience). Crowds increase the risk of stressful interaction, and the arts which focus on activities associated with crowds are not required by the Epicurean. The conception of art attributed to the Epicureans by a scholiast on Dionysius Thrax, “art (*technē*) is a method which achieves that which is advantageous to life” (227b Usener), is not remarkable for its originality and resembles one by the Stoic Zeno.<sup>9</sup> As a definition it even leaves room for a view that rhetoric can achieve its stated aims (persuasion of crowds, say) but it insists on the criterion of advantage. Yet the understanding of what is advantageous will depend on what one prioritizes in life.

Epicurus may have been motivated to belittle rhetoric because potential followers would have regarded teachers of rhetoric as a viable alternative for acquiring “life-skills.” Epicurus, in a sense, was in competition not only with other rival philosophers but also with the teachers of oratorical

technique.<sup>10</sup> While these declarations reveal that rhetoric was a neglected, or hardly valued, discipline within the School, it was an inevitable fact that nearly every person in antiquity who decided to follow Epicurean philosophy already had some training in rhetoric, because they would have received the same sort of standard education as every other member of the social elites of the Greco-Roman world.<sup>11</sup> The Epicurean School recruited its members from adults, not children, and there is no evidence that membership was sustained by rearing the children of existing members within an alternative educational system. So we can assume that rhetoric was a kind of knowledge that every Epicurean already possessed before becoming a member, and that although an Epicurean might consciously choose not to activate certain elements of that education or deploy them in the pursuit of certain objectives, it would be impossible, and not necessarily desirable either, for him to eradicate this education entirely. The superficial Epicurean rejection of rhetoric as a preoccupation does not therefore inevitably entail the absence of rhetorical form from all Epicurean discourse, or the eradication of such knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

## THE EVIDENCE OF PHILODEMUS ON EARLIER EPICUREAN ATTITUDES TO RHETORIC

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We possess substantial portions of a long work *On Rhetoric* (*Rhet.*) by Philodemus, an Epicurean philosopher who resided in Italy in the first century BCE.<sup>13</sup> Although the text of this work is fragmentary and editorial efforts are still in progress, it provides valuable evidence that the Epicurean stance towards rhetoric was not as simple as might be supposed from other testimonies, and even that the position on rhetoric was a matter of some debate within the School, at least in later periods.<sup>14</sup> The first three books are devoted to establishing the correct understanding of rhetoric's status and the limits of its applicability in conformity with the direction provided by Epicurus and the Founders of the School. At the same time, it is important to be aware that Philodemus's own citations from Epicurus and the early Epicureans serve to substantiate his own position in an argument with other Epicurean communities on the view of the Founders on the status of

epideictic rhetoric. Philodemus, following the scholar Zeno of Sidon,<sup>15</sup> believes that Epicurus and the Founders distinguished epideictic rhetoric (or “sophistic,” as Philodemus prefers to label it) from the other kinds of rhetoric practiced in law courts and assemblies (forensic and deliberative). According to Philodemus, Epicurus declared that epideictic was an art, while forensic and deliberative rhetoric were not arts, but activities based on practice and experience.<sup>16</sup> Since we only have the voice of one side in this debate (Philodemus’s), and we do not have access to the entire corpus of Epicurean writing to verify Philodemus’s arguments, we should entertain the possibility that he has been selective in his citations and biased in his interpretations. It would certainly be risky to assume that Philodemus presents us with Epicurus’s most significant pronouncements on the subject of rhetoric.

Be that as it may, Philodemus does provide the only evidence that comes unequivocally from a professional Epicurean philosopher in his own voice. Philodemus’s study conforms in many respects to the standard discussions of rhetoric as a discipline, as can be seen from a comparison with treatments by Cicero and Quintilian. The same issues are addressed, the same topics are covered.<sup>17</sup> Is rhetoric an art? What are rhetoric’s objectives? Can those objectives be achieved through some other means? What are the contexts or divisions of rhetoric? What are the virtues of style?

Philodemus has a problem, in that the term “rhetoric” was habitually used to cover expertise in a variety of applications. Although earlier philosophers and rhetoricians had long recognized different branches of rhetoric determined by the context of their performance (deliberative, forensic, and epideictic being common broad divisions) the general assumption was that the branches could still be unified under a single overarching science. Philodemus’s strategy is to invoke a form of analysis which makes uncompromising demands on what can be meaningfully classified as art (τέχνη), but claims to be basing his classification on Greek language usage (*Rhet.* 2<sup>1</sup> *P.Herc.* 1674 col. 38.2–15 Longo Auricchio, *Ricerche*):

Well then, among the Greeks art is conceived and spoken of as a faculty or disposition derived from observation of certain common and basic elements which pervade the majority of cases, a faculty which both apprehends and achieves the kind of thing which no one of those who have not learned it (can do) in a similar way, whether firmly and securely or by conjecture ...<sup>18</sup>

and in this analysis deliberative and forensic rhetoric are found wanting while “sophistic” rhetoric, it is argued, satisfies the criteria. As Philodemus says (*Rhet.* 2<sup>1</sup> *P.Herc.* 1674 col. 43.14–22 Longo Auricchio, *Ricerche*):

We declare that sophistic rhetoric is an art and that political rhetoric is not an art. And if someone forces us to apply the labels, we shall say that the one, as we have laid out, is marked with an identifying characteristic, while the other is not.

Philodemus denies the common assumption that the three main domains of oratory represent three parts of the same thing because they share a common designation, *rhetorikē* (*Rhet.* 2<sup>1</sup> *P.Herc.* 1674 col. 58.2–26 Longo Auricchio, *Ricerche*):

And we show our handiwork and the reason why we say the rhetoric called “sophistic” is an art and not a part of rhetoric. For the panegyric activity is not a part of rhetoric, and the political, and the forensic, in the way he himself supposes in his entire treatise,<sup>19</sup> just as the marine animal is not a part of dog nor the land animal ... .

“Sophistic” rhetoric seems to match the epideictic domain which would ordinarily include “panegyric.” Philodemus is not necessarily guilty of contravening Epicurus’s injunction against participating in panegyric (10.120).<sup>20</sup> Even if the philosopher acknowledges the technical status of the kind of rhetoric which informs panegyric display, that does not mean he chooses to engage in such displays. This is no doubt why Philodemus reports that the Founders of the School showed sophistic to be an art of prose writing as well as composition of displays, not an art of pleading cases and addressing the people (*Rhet.* 2<sup>1</sup> *P.Herc.* 1674 col. 24.1–7 Longo Auricchio, *Ricerche*):

τέχνην [ἐῖν]αι τὴν σοφιστικὴν τῶν λόγων συγγράφειν | καὶ ἐπιθεῖς ποιεῖσθαι,  
[τοῦ δὲ] δίκας λέγειν | καὶ δημῳγοῦν οὐκ εἶναι τέχνην.

The positioning of written speech (συγγράφειν) first in this report is significant. One detects a tendency for Philodemus to distance himself from the application of epideictic in public performance.

In Book 3, when Philodemus elaborates on the failure of political rhetoric, his citations from Epicurus imply that the Founder of the School acknowledged that a certain kind of pleasure was to be derived from a speech which was composed and delivered by one trained in rhetoric (*Rhet.*



3 *P.Herc.* 1426 col. 3a.7–17, 25–29, col. 4a.8–14 = *P.Herc.* 1506 col. 50.22–32, col. 51.4–11, 19–24, Hammerstaedt, “Der Schlussteil,” 26–29):

Every time they listen (to sophists) in displays and at festivals (ἐν ταῖς δεξιῇσι[ν] καὶ ταῖς πανηγύρεσι[ν]), says Epicurus, and are stirred in their souls (ψυχῶν χαλῶν) because the speech is not about a contract, or not about things to their advantage, as is the case in assemblies and law courts ... . In the festival and display speeches of the sophists they waste neither a thought for an oath (for they have not sworn to judge correctly) nor for whether what is being said is to the city’s advantage or not ... in fact the speech is about nothing urgent (οὐ περὶ κατὰ[ἐ]ργον τίς τις γὰρ οὐδένος)—so that they listen at festival speeches in a state where they are detached from the debate.

And a little further on (*Rhet.* 3 *P.Herc.* 1426 cols. 4a.14–5a.2 = *P.Herc.* 1506 cols. 51.24–52.4 Hammerstaedt, “Der Schlussteil,” 28–31):

And when they listen in this way, they do not pay attention to whether what is said is to their advantage or not, or whether it is altogether true or not, but because they feel led in their souls by the sound alone, by the periods, the precisely balanced clausulae, the antitheses, and the homoeoteleuta, they come to expect that if they babble in the same way in assemblies and courts they will make a good impression, not realizing that they would not have endured it if they heard (someone else) droning on like this in an assembly or court.

The audience in these panegyric displays is impressed by the sonic and formal aspects of the speech, not the content as such. In fact it would be wrong to construe the emotional experience labeled *psychagōgia* as “persuasion” at all, since it does not impose conviction or alter the opinions of an audience. Presumably it lasts only as long as the performance itself.<sup>21</sup> Yet we should be alert to the careful imposition of limits in Epicurus’s formulation. Pleasure is central to Epicurean doctrine, but the sources of pleasure require discrimination in *Key Doctrines* (KD) 8/*Vatican Sayings* (SV) 50, “No pleasure in itself is bad; but the things which are capable of creating (ποιητικά) certain pleasures add many more disturbances (ὀχλήσεις) than the pleasures.” The word translated here as “disturbances” (*ochlēseis*) is related to a word which means “crowd” or “mob” (*ochlos*). The selection of this term is interesting, given its political associations, and the metaphor perhaps recalls the discomforts entailed by dealing with crowds in the assembly. To apply the principle of this doctrine to an evaluation of rhetoric which is also a thing productive of pleasure: the pleasure which one legitimately experiences during an epideictic speech can in fact lead to considerable discomfort if one assumes that the discursive conventions are transferable to a different context (such as assembly or law



court). The limitations for this pleasure are provided by the context of the epideictic or panegyric performance. In the fourth book of *On Rhetoric*, Philodemus draws attention to the fact that when delivering a panegyric before a mass audience, the speaker must either conform with the opinions of his audience which may diverge from the truth, or with the dictates of philosophy which may offend his audience and put him at risk.<sup>22</sup>

Although the limits and rules of the debate on rhetoric were largely set already, Philodemus may have had some specific objectives of his own which emerged from his own immediate context: an Epicurean philosopher living in Italy in the first century BCE.<sup>23</sup> The uncoupling of epideictic rhetoric (sophistic) from deliberative and forensic enables Philodemus the freedom to incorporate expertise in prose composition into an Epicurean program of activities and disciplines while simultaneously preserving the disdain for activities of the rhetors who claim that their teachings are useful for civic life. Thus when Philodemus deploys the distinction between skills, conjectural arts, and exact arts in discussions of rhetoric's technical status, he does so not with a view to demonstrating the success of the art in producing persuasion in any of them.

The separation of epideictic from the rest of rhetoric is a bold move, yet Philodemus maintains that it is supported by statements found in the writings of the Founders and that he is following the teachings of Zeno, the scholarch of the Garden at Athens. Yet the fact that the stance adopted in Athens was a source of considerable confusion in other Epicurean communities (Philodemus mentions Cos and Rhodes) and raised questions as to whether this teaching was consistent with Founders' own writings and whether rhetoric as a whole was now to be regarded as a respectable art, is surely an indication of how radical it appeared.<sup>24</sup>

## AN EPICUREAN RHETORIC?

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If rhetoric retains a place within the Epicurean's world, is there a specifically "Epicurean" rhetoric, or at least a set of preferred tendencies and practices in oratory and composition? Though Epicurus avoided the kind of objectives and environments which required him to deploy rhetorical training in a particular way, he was obliged to communicate his

philosophy to his peers and followers, and potential students. Within the confines of the Garden, the philosopher can speak directly with a specific individual or individuals face to face. The Epicureans developed a sophisticated and nuanced set of procedures for this kind of communication, which was termed “frank criticism” (παρρησία). But not all communications were of this kind. Even if the philosopher avoided public lectures, there were many occasions when he was required to entrust his speech to written form. We know that Epicurus wrote works which circulated both within and outside the School. Works designed to be read within the School (perhaps with guidance) by those already committed to philosophy, such as *On Nature*, could focus on careful examination of problems and their explication. Rhetorical elaboration is hardly to be expected. The letters addressed to specific individuals represent a slightly different kind of composition.<sup>25</sup> Epicurus would have been aware that once one has committed speech to writing in this way one loses control of who the audience might be. Although the speech may have been originally directed to a specific audience, it might need to serve others too. In this sort of situation there are no opportunities for the philosopher to react to incomprehension in the audience or to add clarifications in response to questions. Epicurus’s focus on clarity (*saphēneia*) in speech, and this must include textualized speech, would seem to be a predictable response to the challenge posed by discourse where the speaker is not physically present.<sup>26</sup> We have seen already how even some Epicureans disagreed on the message conveyed in some of the Founder’s writings. Philodemus tends to attribute this disagreement to a misunderstanding of Epicurus’s speech, but the cause of the misunderstanding does not lie in Epicurus’s failure to achieve clarity, it is the fault of the reader.<sup>27</sup>

Epicurus’s critics sometimes make his supposed lack of rhetorical or literary elaboration a target. Timocrates, the renegade brother of the trusty Epicurean Metrodorus, claimed that Epicurus repeated himself most of the time in the thirty-seven books of *On Nature*. Yet if clarity is the most reliable means for conveying the findings of reason, then mere variety for its own sake is not a legitimate objective. Diogenes Laertius informs us that Epicurus used the ordinary terms with respect to things (κέχρηται δὲ λέξει κυρίᾳ κατὰ τῶν πραγμάτων, 10.13), which implies an attempt to reduce ambiguity and avoid metaphor.<sup>28</sup> But the term κύριος also means “having

authority,” the sense which it has in the collection of texts known as “Key Doctrines” (Κύρια δόξαι). These doctrines might be expected to require a corresponding κυρία λέξις. Yet metaphor is not entirely absent even from the brief gnomic utterances attributed to the Master.<sup>29</sup> We detect a preoccupation with the objectives of speech, and not speech itself. Speech never becomes the end-in-itself. Thus a short speech or a long speech is just as effective.

Although Epicureans were aware of the fact that an audience is to be taken into account when composing a speech, they did not pursue the line opened up by Nausiphanes of Teos, who imagined that knowledge of natural philosophy would enable the philosopher-rhetor to craft a persuasive speech. Such claims were apparently stifled early.<sup>30</sup> At one point in *On Rhetoric* 8 Philodemus seems to be trying to ascertain how such knowledge of nature could achieve persuasion, and proposes one possible interpretation, that it is derived from a knowledge of the elements from which people are constituted (ἐκ τ[ι]νων ἧ ποίων στοιχείων).<sup>31</sup> An unknown Epicurean opponent of the line on rhetoric taken by Zeno and Philodemus confidently declared that the Founders deny the possibility of there being an art which can persuade crowds (ὄχλων περὶ[[σ]]στικήν),<sup>32</sup> and Philodemus never contradicts him on this point in the surviving portions of *On Rhetoric*. Instead, the Epicurean teacher focused on the more feasible adjustment of discourse to the moods and experiences of an individual in direct contact, as is shown by passages from *On Frank Criticism*. Attempting to respond effectively to similar fluctuations in mood in a mass audience would be beyond the power of anyone. Besides, it is not moods and atomic constitutions which are the first target of Epicurean discourse, but the opinions which inspire those moods.

Arguably, Epicurus and his audience would have had no other expertise to fall back upon in composing speech and writing than the very rhetorical training they had enjoyed as youths. In particular, those works which are addressed to a specific individual but are simultaneously amenable to broader circulation provide opportunities for the deployment of strategies and tropes derived from the rhetorical education of the day. Some of the letters are clearly protreptic in character, and thus have the explicit objective of persuading their audience to turn to philosophy.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the most famous, and controversial, example of an Epicurean who turned his

rhetorical education to the service of Epicureanism is the Roman poet Lucretius. Yet, as Armstrong has demonstrated, Philodemus too can turn out elegant, rhetorically manipulated discourse when he chooses. In a passage devoted to the subject of painful death (*On Death* cols. 8.1–9.14) Armstrong finds the effectiveness of the argument lies in the very avoidance of the more obvious formal devices associated with Isocrates, and in the judicious deployment of poetic imagery and metaphorical language to enhance originality of thought: this blend of informality and eloquence gives the discourse the character of sincerity.<sup>34</sup>

Philodemus provides one Epicurean perspective on how technical skills inherited from rhetorical education could be adjusted and deployed. Robert Gaines has shown that Philodemus engaged critically with this body of knowledge, selecting and prioritizing the virtues of style which conformed to the prescriptions of Epicurus and the Founders.<sup>35</sup> Even if Philodemus admits the technical status of epideictic, and the possibility of an Epicurean's utilizing it when composing his own discourses, he is ruthless in exposing the limits of this art and the competence of its practitioners. For instance, in the composition of speeches of praise and blame, a prominent element in epideictic and panegyric, Philodemus draws attention to the inability of rhetors to execute this activity credibly and in accordance with rational principles.<sup>36</sup> From an Epicurean perspective the rhetoric of praise and blame are potentially useful in the discourse of protreptic (and here we surely see a *kind* of persuasion as the object of rhetoric), but only a philosopher will be qualified to deploy the rhetorical tropes properly, since he possesses knowledge of what should truly be praised and blamed. Unlike the display speeches and panegyrics, the discourse of Epicurean protreptic is concerned with the most important matters of all, more important in fact than those discussed in assembly or court. The key principle is that the philosopher must prevent his audience from being distracted by the *sound* of the discourse and from not paying careful attention to what is being said, a fault which Epicurus reportedly (by Philodemus in *Rhet.* 3 mentioned above) identified in panegyric. At the same time—and perhaps Zeno and Philodemus represent some Epicureans who felt this way—the philosopher should not discourse in a manner which alienates his audience or readership.

In conclusion, it is probably fair to say that the Epicurean attitude to rhetoric as an art or discipline is not owed so much to the ontological status

of the art itself as it is to the kind of lifestyle (or *βίος*) that is entailed by prioritizing the art. The Epicurean sage disdains the life of the practitioner of the art (the rhetor), who deploys his art in order to attain objectives which are given undue priority and in so doing experiences a life of frustration and anxiety. David Blank has correctly asserted that the Epicurean attitude to the arts (including rhetoric) was conditioned by the privileged position accorded philosophy.<sup>37</sup> From our own modern perspective, we might add that it was also conditioned by another kind of privilege, the socio-economic status enjoyed by Epicurus and his peers who were able to take the benefits of a liberal education for granted, and thus despise it.

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<sup>1</sup> The event and its social and cultural consequences are recoverable from a number of sources, including Plut. *Cat. mai.* 22 and Cic. *De or.* 2.155.

<sup>2</sup> In his monograph on the broader significance of this doctrine within the Epicurean school and beyond, Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 33 reminds us that the maxim does not actually appear in the extant works of Epicurus. In the first book of *On Life-styles* Epicurus said that the wise man will not participate in affairs of the city (οὐδὲ πολιτεύεσθαι, DL 10.119). The Epicurean Philodemus notes that Romans and Spartans did not need rhetoric to make treaties (*On Rhetoric* 2<sup>1</sup> P.Herc. 1674 fr. 5.5–10 Longo Auricchio, *Ricerche*).

<sup>3</sup> See Grimaldi's clarification of the meaning of *antistrophos* in this context ("analogue," "correlative"): Aristotle *Rhetoric* I, 1–2.

<sup>4</sup> The opening of S.E. *M.* 1.1–4 can be taken as representative. See Blank's introductory remarks which serve to contextualize the Epicurean position and his commentary on these passages: Blank, *Sextus Empiricus. Against the Grammarians*, xxvii–xxxii and 69–80.

<sup>5</sup> Plutarch caught the allusion (*Quomodo adul.* 15d). Ironically DL uses the same allusion when he speaks of the beneficial effect of Epicurus's doctrines (10.9).

<sup>6</sup> Blank, "Philosophia and techne," 218–19 uses Philodemus *On Household Management* (*De oec.*) col. 37.2–40 to illustrate a view in Epicureanism that the competent amateur can perform many useful activities successfully while avoiding the immersion which would become too distracting and harmful.

<sup>7</sup> All the more insulting since he acknowledges poetry, writing, and painting in lines 1444–51. One might compare the claims of Crassus in Cic. *De or.* 1.8.33.

<sup>8</sup> Even the establishment of a school should not result in the drawing of crowds (σχολήν κατασκευάσειν, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὥστ' ὄχλαγωγῆσαι, 10.121b).

<sup>9</sup> Preserved by Olympiodorus in his commentary on Plato's *Gorgias* 12.1.69, echoed in S.E. *M.* 2.10.

<sup>10</sup> Or possibly in competition with individuals who claimed expertise in both, such as Nausiphanes of Teos, Epicurus's former teacher, as reported by S.E. *M.* 1.2; his colleague and successor, Hermarchus, whose father, we are told, was poor was initially a student of rhetoric (DL 10.24).

<sup>11</sup> A notable exception may have been the Apelles addressed by Epicurus as "untainted by any education at all" (καθαρὸς πάσης παιδείας) in another lost letter, a fragment of which is preserved by Plutarch and Athenaeus (= Usener 117). Modern views that Epicurus aimed to make his doctrines accessible to the "average person"—Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*, 233–34; Pesce, *Saggio su Epicuro*, 22—need to be qualified, even if the tradition reports (DL 10.3 and 10) that the slave Mys was admitted into Epicurus's circle.

<sup>12</sup> Marković, *The Rhetoric of Explanation*, 19–29 argues that Epicurean didactic procedure adopts and improves upon certain formal characteristics in the standard educational practices of the elite in the second and first centuries BCE.

<sup>13</sup> About sixty of the numbered papyrus items in the Herculaneum library, the most for any work: Dorandi, "Per una ricomposizione," 59–64. Its original length is still not known for certain, though evidence is accumulating that it extended to twenty books: Ranocchia, "Philodemus' *On Rhetoric* was in 20 Books,".

<sup>14</sup> Sudhaus, *Philodemi Volumina Rhetorica I* issued an edition of the papyri which he considered to belong to the work at the time. The only attempt at an English translation of Sudhaus's text is



Hubbell, “The *Rhetorica* of Philodemus,” but since this is based on a text published before the advances in editorial technique which were developed subsequently, and especially in the past forty years, it is not only often inaccurate but even misleading. More recent translations in various modern languages have been made of freshly edited portions of the text; a very significant development recently is Nicolardi, *Filodemo, il primo libro della retorica*. David Blank is preparing a new edition of Books 1 and 2, Robert Gaines of Book 4. A very convenient overview of the contents of the work is offered by Di Matteo, “La retorica da Epicuro a Filodemo.”

<sup>15</sup> Philodemus insists that Zeno did not write formally on the subject (*Rhet.* 2<sup>1</sup> *P.Herc.* 1674 col. 53.12–14 Longo Auricchio, *Ricerche*), but we assume he lectured on it; Blank, “La philologie comme arme philosophique,” 248–49 has argued that Zeno may have incorporated a reformed version of rhetoric into the curriculum. Philodemus’s citations from Epicurus and the Founders are assembled and analyzed by Longo Auricchio, “Testimonianze dalla retorica di Filodemo.”

<sup>16</sup> Detailed discussion of this issue in the surviving sections of Books 1 and 2 can be found in Blank, “Philodemus and the Technicity of Rhetoric” and “La philologie comme arme philosophique”; and Chandler, *Philodemus on Rhetoric Books 1 and 2*, 59–103.

<sup>17</sup> Barnes, “Is Rhetoric an Art?” provides a good overview of the tradition in which Philodemus is writing, elaborated upon by Roochnik, “Is Rhetoric an Art?,” who emphasizes the foundational roles of Plato and Isocrates on these questions and why they mattered.

<sup>18</sup> I have followed Blank’s editorial decisions here (“Atomist rhetoric,” 71), though Gaines, “Cicero, Philodemus, and the Development,” 209 n. 26 makes a case for a slightly different restoration in lines 14–15 (ῥ[ι]τ[ε] instead of Blank’s [εῖ]τ[ε]), and follows Longo Auricchio in maintaining μαθόντων ἔνιοι, “some of those who have learned,” against Blank’s μαθόντων <οὐδέ τις>, εἴ[θ’] in line 13, but little hangs on this distinction. Philodemus would seem to be following a procedure which establishes concepts linked to ordinary language (cf. *Ep. Hdt.* 37–38, and perhaps Epic. *On Nature* 28 *P.Herc.* 1479 fr. 13 cols. 4 inf., 1–5 sup., 12 Sedley, “Epicurus, *On Nature* book XXVIII,” 48); see Fine, “Concepts and Inquiry,” 91, 104–105 on the Epicurean view that it is essential to have a concept (*prolepsis*) of something before one can inquire into it.

<sup>19</sup> The unnamed target of Philodemus’s attack composed a refutation of Zeno’s claim that the Founders of the School stated that rhetoric is an art.

<sup>20</sup> Erbi, “La retorica nell’epicureismo,” 190–91 draws attention to this and other apparent discrepancies between Philodemus and the doxographical tradition on Epicurus.

<sup>21</sup> Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics*, 181–83 examines the idea of *psychagōgia* as compelling rhetoric; see Chandler, *Philodemus on Rhetoric Books 1 and 2*, 147–67 for an attempt to contextualize *psychagōgia* in Epicurean thinking.

<sup>22</sup> As pointed out by Gaines, “Philodemus and the Epicurean Outlook on Epideictic Speaking,” 197 citing *Rhet.* 4 *P.Herc.* 1007 cols. 36a.15–24, 33a.13–24, and 37a.4–17.

<sup>23</sup> One can only speculate as to what these were. Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 38, supported by Di Matteo, “La retorica da Epicuro a Filodemo,” 87–88, would see Philodemus adjusting the Epicurean approach to rhetoric, poetry, and music in response to a new appreciation for ἐγκύκλια μαθήματα prevalent in Italy of the late Republic; or even an undeclared polemic against Cicero (Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 40–45), a possibility which is further debated by Gaines, “Philodemus and Cicero on Models of Rhetorical Expression,” 269–72; and Wisse, “Atticists, Academics and Epicureans.”

<sup>24</sup> The picture can be reconstructed from Philodemus’s account in *Rhet.* 2<sup>1</sup> *P.Herc.* 1674 cols. 52.11–53.7 Longo Auricchio, *Ricerche*, with Blank’s editorial improvements: “La philologie comme arme philosophique,” 252. The disagreement has been discussed several times, e.g. Sedley, “Philosophical Allegiance in the Greco-Roman World,” 112–13; Blank, “La philologie comme arme philosophique.”

<sup>25</sup> Clay, “Philodemus on the Plain Speaking,” 58 has described Epicurus’s epistles as philosophy exhibited in action.

<sup>26</sup> The entire topic of *saphēneia* receives detailed treatment by Milanese, *Lucida Carmina*, reviewed by Longo Auricchio, “Retorica da Epicuro a Lucrezio.”

<sup>27</sup> An established strategy, which finds parallels in the accusations which Philo directs against rival interpreters of the scriptures (e.g. *On the Unchangeableness of God*, 21).

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle explicitly linked κύρια ὀνόματα (“ordinary nouns”) to clarity in *Poet.* 1458a18–20 and *Rh.* 1404b5–8. See Arrighetti, “Epicuro, la κυρία λέξις e i πράγματα,” 18–22 on this and the connection between Diogenes’s testimony and Epicurus’s understanding of the correct use of language for philosophical inquiry.

<sup>29</sup> See the remarkable phrase “voice of the flesh” (σὰρκὸς φωνή) in SV 33.

<sup>30</sup> Philodemus preserves the title of a work by Metrodorus, *Against Those Who Say That Good Rhetors Come from Natural Philosophy* (*Rhet.* 2<sup>1</sup> *P.Herc.* 1674 col. 27.16–19 Longo, revised by Blank, “Atomist Rhetoric in Philodemus,” 74 n. 22). Blank, “Atomist Rhetoric in Philodemus,” 75–88 has a detailed discussion of Philodemus’s refutation of Nausiphane’s claims in *Rhet.* 8 (*P.Herc.* 1015 and 832).

<sup>31</sup> *P.Herc.* 1015 col. 15.13–15; Blank, “Atomist Rhetoric in Philodemus,” 80. Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics*, 174 makes the point that the fact that Philodemus poses this possibility as a question suggests that it was not a link that Nausiphane made himself.

<sup>32</sup> *Rhet.* 2<sup>1</sup> *P.Herc.* 1674 cols. 54.34–55.2 Longo Auricchio with Blank’s editorial improvements, “Atomist Rhetoric in Philodemus,” 72.

<sup>33</sup> The opening sentences of the *Letter to Menoeceus* offer a good example of carefully manipulated language; Usener, *Epicurea*, xlii even imagines one might question the letter’s authenticity *propter ipsam stili elegantiam ab Epicuro non solum neglectam sed etiam contemptam*. Schenkeveld, “Philosophical Prose,” 206–209 offers a useful analysis of the letter, while pointing out that it starts as a protreptic and then takes on a paraenetic complexion.

<sup>34</sup> Armstrong, “All Things to All Men,” 23–27.

<sup>35</sup> Grube’s outline in *The Greek and Roman Critics*, 200–206 is still useful, but surpassed by Gaines, “Qualities of Rhetorical Expression in Philodemus” and “Philodemus and Cicero on Models of Rhetorical Expression,” on parallels between Cicero and Philodemus on models of expression, which may be arbitrary and unconnected to naturally beautiful expression. Gaines, “Cicero, Philodemus, and the Development” convincingly demonstrates how Philodemus is anchored in developments and issues in rhetorical theory during the first century BCE.

<sup>36</sup> See Philodemus *Rhet.* 4 cols. 39a.4–40a.4; Gaines, “Philodemus and the Epicurean Outlook on Epideictic Speaking,” 195–96.

<sup>37</sup> Blank, “Philosophia and Techne,” 216.

## CHAPTER 14

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# POETICS

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MICHAEL MCOSKER

## INTRODUCTION

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EPICURUS<sup>1</sup> famously got his start in philosophy when a teacher was unable to explain Hesiod's Chaos to him.<sup>2</sup> Since its teachers claimed a great deal of cultural prestige for poetry, Epicurus expected that they would be able to justify their claims.<sup>3</sup> When this particular teacher could not explain a problem, Epicurus left in disgust and turned to philosophy and natural science. This anecdote need not be literally true to stand as an emblem for Epicurean engagement with the *ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία* (roughly "liberal arts") and with poetry above all: teachers of *paideia* cannot explain the way the world works, and when that fact is forgotten, problems arise and people's lives are troubled.

My goal here is to explain Epicurean engagement with poetry. The first part of my discussion takes the form of a chronologically organized account of the Epicureans' attitude towards poetry. Epicurus's opinion can be reconstructed, but imprecision on a crucial point has clouded the issue. In the second part, examples of Epicurean engagement with poetry, both as critics and writers, will be examined.

Scholarly engagement with the views of ancient philosophers, especially Hellenistic philosophers, on poetry, rhetoric, and music has been limited both by the paucity of ancient evidence and by modern interest in different topics. Nonetheless, good, interesting work has been done on Epicurean and Stoic rhetoric and musicology.<sup>4</sup> Pride of place has long belonged to Epicurean poetics, however, in large part because so much of Philodemus's treatise *On Poems* survives in the Herculaneum papyri. These papyri present particular challenges, but for *On Poems*, at least, an end is in sight: Richard Janko has published editions of three of the five books (1, 3, and 4); a fourth (2) is nearing completion, and the fifth book, already available in Cecilia Mangoni's reliable edition, is being re-edited with the aid of infrared photography and new techniques for arranging fragments. The newly achieved textual security allows certain opinions to be firmly rejected and others to take their place in the debate.

In the past, scholars have attributed a variety of positions and attitudes to Epicurus and his followers. For the most part, their evidence was drawn from Diogenes Laertius and Cicero, in an attempt to explain Lucretius's poem. These scholars divide into two camps, broadly speaking (with some in the middle). One group argues that the original ban on poetry was complete, while others think that the ban did not exist or was limited in some way.

Belonging to the first camp is Tescari, who thought that Epicurus had originally forbidden all poetry, but that later Epicureans had relaxed the ban; both he and Giancotti claimed that the sage's enjoyment of Dionysiac spectacles was a test of impassivity, rather than an occasion to enjoy and derive pleasure from them (despite the actual wording of fr. 20 and 593).<sup>5</sup> Boyancé attributes a great deal, like Giancotti, to Lucretius's historical setting and thinks that poetry is, for Lucretius, light and charm ("lumière et charme"), and that this means that it was fully capable of argumentative clarity (even better than prose!) and of providing real *hēdonē*, which attracts the non-rational parts of us.<sup>6</sup> De Lacy and De Lacy take Colotes to be following Epicurus's position, which they claim is a total ban on poetry, because poetic language is unclear and confusing, and therefore ill-suited to expressing philosophical argumentation.<sup>7</sup> In their second edition, they maintain that Colotes objects to Plato's use of the phrase "good poet" at *Lysis* 206b8 because it is an opinion and not evident (*κατὰ δοξαζόμενον*,

and not κατὰ τὸ ἐναργές).<sup>8</sup> Crönert also thought that Epicurean doctrine evolved over time, arguing that early Epicureans tried to turn their students away from study of the poets; later Epicureans permitted it under the influence of the Stoics.<sup>9</sup>

In the second camp, Schmid suggested that any poetry which served *hēdonē* or *ataraxia* was acceptable.<sup>10</sup> Waszink thought that simple poetry by early men, of the sort described by Lucretius in his account of the development of human culture at 5.1379–1411, was acceptable, but not ambitious poetry (e.g. that of Lucretius), because the pleasure from it is “too complicated to be the truly Epicurean *hēdonē*” (cf. Lucretius 5.1412–35).<sup>11</sup> Philippson points out that Epicurus’s line ποιήματα δ’ ἐνεργεῖαι οὐκ ἄν ποιῆσαι (the sage would not write poetry for an *energeia*) (fr. 568 = DL 10.121b) was not a total ban, but that Epicurus thought the sage simply had more important things to do.<sup>12</sup> Asmis has argued strongly (and correctly, in my view) for a version of Philippson’s view: she takes *energeia* to mean that poetry should not be an occupation for an Epicurean that takes up too much time and effort.<sup>13</sup> This view is opposed by Arrighetti: see below in the next section for discussion.<sup>14</sup>

Since so much more evidence is now available, we must re-evaluate Epicurus’s position. We can see that Epicurus and his immediate followers probably held developed views about poetry from the start, but their focus, so far as it is revealed by the surviving fragments, was on the harmful effects of the standard educational curriculum, which included a great deal of poetry. Later, with Demetrius Laco and Philodemus of Gadara, we have extant treatises that focus specifically on poetry. Poetry, except for Lucretius, never becomes a didactic tool for Epicureans, but in it they are able to find utility, in the form of illustrations and starting-points (*aphormai*) for discussion.

## EPICURUS

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The major problems in understanding Epicurus’s position are (i) reconciling his apparently negative attitude towards poetry with Philodemus’s apparently more positive one and (ii) reconciling this attitude with

Philodemus's and Lucretius's poetic production. However, the problem is really just one of perspective: is poetry being treated *qua* poetry or as part of, or as a synecdoche for, liberal arts education generally? Once we have Epicurus's opinions about liberal arts education—of which poetry was a large part—we can see his attitude about poetry, *qua* poetry, much more clearly.

To be blunt, Epicurus did not value the contemporary *ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία*. Two famous lines from his letters to Apelles and Pythocles tell most of the story: *μακαρίζω σε, ὦ Ἀπελλῆ, ὅτι καθαρὸς πάσης παιδείας ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν ὥρμησας* (“I call you blessed, Apelles, because you set out for philosophy, pure of all education”) and *παιδείαν δὲ πᾶσαν, μακάριε, φεῦγε τᾷκάτιον ἀράμενο* (“hoist the sail on your raft and flee, O blessed one, all education”).<sup>15</sup>

Why such hostility? In short, because poetry is not Epicurean philosophy, which is the only means by which someone can live a good life. Rhetoric, history, poetry, and declamations do not teach happiness; they lead instead towards a life of busy civic involvement rather than peaceful contemplation and pleasure. They are therefore to be avoided. Poetry, additionally, contained the *ὀλέθριον μύθων δέλτα* (“destructive lure of myths”) that is, the danger that the contents of poetry might be understood as authoritative and so mislead its audience into false and damaging beliefs (*ποιητικὴ τύρβη*, “poetic confusion”) about the world.<sup>16</sup>

Sextus Empiricus preserves a series of four arguments against the utility of poetry which were made by others “and especially the Epicureans.”<sup>17</sup> They are as follows:

1. Poetry contains both useful and harmful statements, and it is not the role of grammar but of philosophy to distinguish what is useful from what is harmful. Lacking such a guide, the audience will misunderstand the poetry.
2. Poets do not have any special access to the truth nor particular knowledge of what is useful; only philosophers do.
3. Poets do not aim at providing anything useful in their poems, unlike prose authors, but aim solely at entertainment, which is better accomplished with fiction than truth.

- Poetry is not only useless, but actually harmful since it encourages
4. the passions.

The first three of these arguments attack the usefulness of poetry as a source of truth, for it is either ambiguous or has no legitimate claim to authority; the fourth attacks it on the basis that it is positively harmful. Any sufficiently advanced Epicurean, who knows that poetry is no source of truth and could be the source of injury, probably could read it without distraction or harm.<sup>18</sup> The situation would be parallel to others, according to the principle set out in *KD* 8: “No pleasure is *per se* a bad thing, but some things which cause pleasures bring also disturbances many times more than the pleasures.”<sup>19</sup> For instance, Epicurus said that we should not have sex while overfull from eating or drunk because of possible damage to our atomic constitutions, but sex generally was counted among the pleasures.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, luxurious food and drink are pleasant so long as we do not become accustomed to them and therefore pained when we cannot have them.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, the fact that poetry could be damaging in certain situations does not necessarily warrant a total ban. Indeed, there is evidence that there was no such ban.

That Epicurus was not hostile to poetry, *qua* poetry, is demonstrated by a variety of sources. For example, Plutarch reports but misrepresents Epicurus’s attitude when he remarks on the strangeness of some Epicurean statements (fr. 20, ap. Plut. *Non Posse* 1095c):

... ἀτοπίαν ὧν Ἐπίκουρος λέγει φιλοθέωρον μὲν ἀποφαίνων τὸν σοφὸν ἐν ταῖς Διαπορίαις καὶ χαίροντα παρ’ ὄντινοῦν ἕτερον ἀκροάμασι καὶ θεάμασι Διονυσιακοῖς, προβλήμασι δὲ μουσικοῖς καὶ κριτικῶν φιλολόγοις ζητήμασιν οὐδὲ παρὰ πότον διδοῦς χώραν.

... the strangeness of what Epicurus claims, who demonstrates in the *Diaporiai* that the sage likes spectacles and rejoices just like anyone else at recitals and Dionysiac spectacles, but who does not grant a place to musical questions and the philological problems of literary critics even at a party.

For Plutarch, the enjoyment of poetry and the study of poetry are inseparable. Not so for Epicurus; the sage can go to recitals and performances at festivals of Dionysus and enjoy them *just like any other person*, sc. any non-philosopher. What he will not do is waste his time



studying the grammarians only to score points in eristic symposium table-talk.<sup>22</sup>

A revealing summary of all this can be found in Cicero's *De finibus*, when he makes Lucius Torquatus say (*De fin.* 1.71–72):

[sc. Epicurus] qui quod tibi parum videtur eruditus, ea causa est, quod nullam eruditionem esse duxit nisi quae beatae vitae disciplinam iuvaret. an ille tempus aut in poetis evolvendis ... consumeret, in quibus nulla solida utilitas omnisque puerilis est delectatio? aut se, ut Plato, in musicis geometria numeris astris contereret, quae et a falsis initiis profecta vera esse non possunt et, si essent vera, nihil afferrent quo iucundius, id est quo melius, viveremus? eas ergo artes persequeretur, vivendi artem tantam tamque et operosam et perinde fructuosam relinqueret? non ergo Epicurus ineruditus, sed ii indocti, qui quae pueros non didicisse turpe est, ea putant usque ad senectutem esse discenda.

[sc. Epicurus] who seems to you hardly educated, for the reason that he thought that it was not an education unless it would aid the practice of a happy life, or should he waste time in perusing poets ... in whom there is no solid utility but pure, childish delight? Or wear himself down, as Plato says to do, in the study of music, geometry, mathematics, astronomy, all of which, because they set out from false premises, cannot be true, and even if they were true, bring no help by which we might live more pleasantly, that is, better? Should he pursue those arts and neglect the large and so difficult, but therefore fruitful, art of living? Therefore, Epicurus was not uneducated, but they are, who think that what was not shameful to learn as boys should be studied straight through until old age.<sup>23</sup>

What always mattered to Epicurus was the good life, and the only means to get there is his philosophy. The liberal arts, poetry chief among them, cannot guide a student on the way; indeed, they can be a waste of time, if not damaging. But, importantly, poetry can still be a pleasure.

We can now turn to the two most famous fragments of Epicurus on poetry: those preserved in Diogenes Laertius (10.121 = frs. 568 and 569): ποιήματα δὲ ἐνεργεῖαι (sc. τὸν σοφὸν) οὐκ ἂν ποιῆσαι (“the sage would not write poetry as an *energeia*”) and μόνον τε τὸν σοφὸν ὀρθῶς ἂν περὶ τε μουσικῆς καὶ ποιητικῆς διαλέξεσθαι (“only the sage would discourse correctly about poetry music and poetics”).<sup>24</sup> Asmis has demonstrated that the first statement is not nearly as strong as it is usually taken, and she translates ἐνεργεῖαι as “energetically,” that is, the prohibition is against “busying [oneself] with it or practicing it in the manner of a professional poet.”<sup>25</sup> This argument is reinforced by a consideration of another activity that Epicurus calls ἐνέργεια: philosophy.<sup>26</sup> To write poetry with the intensity with which Epicurus wants you to study philosophy is, in short, to be something like a professional poet.

As the second statement in Diogenes shows, the sage was not prohibited from engagement with poetry on an intellectual level; after all, he can discourse correctly about it. Epicurus's discussion of Menander's *Georgos* and Philodemus's treatise *On the Good King According to Homer* are examples of such discourses.<sup>27</sup> Without being able to discourse correctly about poetry, the sage would be open to the criticisms of grammarians and critics who claimed to find useful content in literature, but more importantly, as I will later discuss, he knows how to turn poetry to useful ends in his lessons.

## METRODORUS

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No extensive discussion survives from the pen of Metrodorus, the second-in-command of the Garden, but he did write an *On Poems* in at least two books, of which some fragments are preserved in Philodemus's *On Rhetoric* II.<sup>28</sup> These discuss what type(s) of rhetoric could be considered *technai*. Metrodorus must have used rhetoric as a comparandum for poetry, i.e. was it a *technē* or not, and on what grounds? We know Philodemus's answer: it is a *technē*, but not very much of one.<sup>29</sup>

The most famous and important fragment, however, is in Plutarch's *Non Posse* (1094e = fr. 24 Körte):

... ὅθεν μὴδ' εἰδέναι φάσκων, μεθ' ὁποτέρων ἦν ὁ Ἑκτωρ, ἢ τοὺς πρώτους στίχους τῆς Ὀμήρου ποιήσεως ἢ πάλιν τὰ ἐν μέσῳ, μὴ ταρβήσῃς.

... for which reason do not be upset to say that you do not know on whose side Hector was or the first lines of Homer's poetry or what happened in the middle.

Plutarch quotes it to abuse the Epicureans for ignoring the pleasures of the liberal arts, but he misrepresents the point: you do not need to know Homer's poetry thoroughly, or even anything about it, to live a pleasant life according to Epicurus. Put differently, once you are freed from the fear (N.B. *ταρβέω*) that you *need* to know Homer's poetry and from the mistaken belief that Homer teaches the truth, you are free to enjoy his poetry as poetry (or to ignore it as irrelevant).

We can gather from lengthy paraphrase (preserved in Philodemus's discussion of rhetoric in the second book of his *On Rhetoric*) that

Metrodorus discussed rhetoric and poetry in parallel in his *On Poems*. His point seems to be that, beyond elementary training in the rules (ἐπαγγέλματα), experience was necessary to become a better poet or orator.

*On Rhetoric* II, *P.Herc.* 1674, col. 51.16–29 (p. 149 Longo Auricchio):<sup>30</sup>

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>16 ὁ<br/>         πρ]οτεθ[ειμένοCλέγειν<br/>         [έν] ὅχλωι κ[αὶ ποη-<br/>         τήC εἶναι θηρεύει ἀ-<br/>         πὸ τῶν<br/>         ἐπαγγέλμ[ά]των</p> <p>20 τὸ ἐφέξηC τοῦ ἀκολού-<br/>         θου τοῖC τοιούτοιC<br/>         ἐπαγ-<br/>         γέλμαCιν, ὅ[C]<br/>         δυνάμ[ε]ωC<br/>         οἶαν εἰκόν'<br/>         ἀποβλέπ[ω]ν<br/>         καὶ α[ὐ]τὸC τὸ ἔργον<br/>         [Cω]ν-</p> <p>25 τ]ελῶν τῇC τούτο[υ]<br/>         τ[έ]-<br/>         χνηC φαίν]εται, μή που<br/>         τι<br/>         α[ὐτ]ὸν διαφεύγη[ν] δι'<br/>         ὧ[ν]<br/>         ἂν βελτερίω[ν] γίνοιτο<br/>         ῥη-</p> <p>29 τω]ρ ἧ ποητήC.</p> | <p>He who has proposed to speak in public<br/>         or be a poet hunts down, starting from the<br/>         basics, the main part of what follows on<br/>         such lessons, and he obviously looks<br/>         towards a sort of image of capability and<br/>         himself accomplishes the task of his art,<br/>         so that nothing through which he might<br/>         become a better orator or poet can<br/>         somehow escape him.</p> |
|---|--|

As Chandler points out, the discussion is about the training of orators and what counts as rhetoric for the Epicureans.<sup>31</sup> We can assume that Metrodorus handled the same analogous topics in the case of poetry, but we

do not have any hints about what else Metrodorus might have discussed in his treatise.

## COLOTES

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Colotes was a favorite student and friend of Epicurus.<sup>32</sup> He is primarily known for his polemical treatise *On the Proposition “That It Is Impossible Even to Live According to the Doctrines of Other Philosophers,”* which Plutarch refuted at length. The Herculaneum papyri preserve fragments of two other works of his, the anti-commentaries *Against Plato’s Euthydemus* (*P.Herc.* 1032) and *Against Plato’s Lysis* (*P.Herc.* 208).<sup>33</sup> In the latter, in a discussion occasioned by a remark of Socrates at the beginning of the *Lysis*, about how best to seduce an *erōmenos*, he mentions the *prolēpsis* (preconception) of the good poet. (One of the interlocutors, Hippothales, was so enamored that he even wrote poetry!) Socrates rounds off the discussion by warning him to not make his beloved too arrogant, lest he come to spurn him, and finishes by saying (Plat. *Lysis* 206b6–8):

καίτοι οἶμαι ἐγὼ ἄνδρα ποιήσει βλάπτοντα ἑαυτὸν οὐκ ἂν σε ἐθέλειν ὁμολογῆσαι ὡς ἀγαθὸς ποτ’ ἐστὶ ποιητής, βλαβερὸς ὢν ἑαυτῷ.

And yet I think that you would not be willing to agree that a man who harms himself with poetry is a good poet, since he is harmful to himself.

It is this conclusion that Colotes discusses:<sup>34</sup>

*Against Plato’s Lysis* (T. IV, p. 10b, ll. 4–14 = p. 164 Crönert)

- 4 οὗτος παρ' ἐ- ... this man on his own ... to define “a good  
5 αὐτῷ καλεῖν ἀγαθὸν poet” ... thought he was a good poet. And it  
πο]ιητ[ὴν] was necessary to contradict Hippothales who  
ἐδοξάζεν (?), being charged on his own to define such a  
α]ὐτὸν ἀγαθὸν man as a good poet according to what is clear  
ποιη- and not a matter of opinion ...  
τὴν εἶναι. καὶ  
τῷ ἡπ-  
ποθάλ[ε]ι  
ἐχρῆ[ν]  
μάχεσθαι  
10 ὅς] διατεταγμ[έ]νος  
παρ' ἐ-  
14 αὐτῷ  
[κ]αλεῖ[ν] κατὰ  
τὸ  
ἐν]αργέ[ς] καὶ  
μὴ [δ]οξαζό-  
μ]ενον  
ἀγα[θὸν] ποι[η-  
τὴν τ]ὸν  
τ[οιοῦτο]ν ...

*Against Plato's Lysis* (T. IV p. 10d, ll. 2–11 = p.165 Crönert):<sup>35</sup>

- 2 βού- ... (sc. “what”) the sound might signify. Well, the  
 λει Cημή{o} common way of speaking among all of us  
 νηι □ ό φθόγ- (Epicureans) was to preserve the utterances in  
 γοC. [άλ]λὰ accordance with what is clear, not the matter of  
 μὴν ἧ γε opinion, nor what this man claims.  
 κοι-
- 5 νη πάντων  
 ἡμῶν όμι-  
 λία ἧν  
 τ[η]ρεῖν  
 τοῦC φ[θ]όγ-  
 γου[C]  
 κᾱ[τ]ὰ τὸ  
 ἐν[α]ργέC,  
 [οὔ] τὸ  
 δοξαζόμενον  
 γ’ ἐκ[ε]ῖνο  
 καὶ οὐχὶ ὃ  
 ο[ὔ]-
- 10 τό]ς φ[ησι]ν.

*Against Plato’s Lysis* (T. IV p. 10 e, ll. 2–13 = p. 165 Crönert):

- 2 κατὰ τὸ ἐν]αργὲς ... according to what is clear and not what is  
κα[ὶ οὐ τὸ  
δοξαζόμενον  
π[ο]τε καὶ  
προδιαλε-  
5 γόμενος μοι τοῦς  
φθόγ-  
γο[υ]ς. ἐν δὲ τοῖς  
κατὰ  
μέρ[ο]ς περὶ  
ποιητῶν  
ἤδη ἀντιλέγωμεν  
κα[ὶ]  
ὁ μὲν φασι] εἴτ'  
ἐναργ[ὲς] εἴ-  
10 να[ι] τὸ  
γ[νω]ριζόμε[ν]ον  
π[ερὶ] ποιητῶν  
ἀγαθῶν  
τῇ [διανοίᾳ  
τρ]όπον  
13 [τινά ...]

Concolino Mancini pointed out that Colotes speaks as if there were a *prolēpsis* of the good poet, founded on *to enarges*, what is clear, and opposed to *to doxazomenon*, what is a matter of opinion.<sup>36</sup> Further, as we see in the second passage, the rules for correct use of language, which is founded on *prolēpseis*, are relevant to the discussion. We know from Philodemus that the Epicureans did think there was a *prolēpsis* of the good poet, and this discussion confirms that Colotes also had one: how could he call someone “good poet” without reference to a *prolēpsis* guaranteeing meaning to that phrase?<sup>37</sup> It is worth noting also that Colotes uses the



opportunity to discuss Epicurean views on language, which is closely connected to epistemology for the Epicureans.

Obviously, given the discussion, it was not Colotes's goal to explain in detail what the *prolēpsis* of the good poet is, but he felt free to invoke the idea, which shows that it had already been discussed previously in the school. The most likely place for such a discussion is Metrodorus's *On Poems*, which seems to have been less concerned with the status of poetry in Epicurean education, but rather with understanding it as a human endeavor: is it a *technē*? What makes a good poet? This last question hints that, even among the first generation of Epicureans, there was a complete "theory of poetry," in which quality and judgment were discussed as well as the ethical import of the contents. That some of these questions were handled by later Epicureans is not an argument against their earlier treatment here: school doctrine had to be defended in the face of criticism, if not developed over the course of time to meet new challenges.

## ZENO OF SIDON

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Zeno of Sidon was scholarch in the early first century BCE and taught Philodemus and Cicero (apparently at different times). His treatise *Περὶ ποιημάτων χρήσεως*, "On the Use of Poems," is not extant.<sup>38</sup> It is possible that a section at the end of Philodemus's *On Poems* 5 is indebted to it, but if so, he used Zeno's treatise only as a sourcebook for others' views.<sup>39</sup> In light of Philodemus's loyalty to his teacher and his statements at *On Poems* 5.17.20–24 that no poet has ever written or will ever write a poem containing useful contents, and at col. 32.17–19, that useful poems are not useful *qua* poems, it seems unlikely that Zeno radically re-evaluated the Epicurean position about the utility of poetry either to meet the new demands of a Roman context or under the influence of Stoic thought.

The title of the work suggests that it was concerned with claims that poetry could be educational or otherwise useful. One thinks of Stoic opponents, who claimed that verse and music had beneficial psychological effects. However, it does not seem to have dealt with questions of how poetry works or is to be judged, that is to say, poetics on its own terms.<sup>40</sup>

## DEMETRIUS LACO

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Demetrius was probably active in the late second and early first centuries BCE; his dates are not secure. He refers to Zeno and is probably a rough contemporary.<sup>41</sup> His treatise, in contrast to the others discussed so far, actually survives in some extensive parts. *P.Herc.* 1014 contains Book 2 and *P.Herc.* 188, much less extensive, is agreed to contain Book 1.<sup>42</sup> Neither book contains a positive exposition of school doctrine in the surviving parts, but Demetrius seems to have been interested in problems rather than the systematic refutation of opponents (like Philodemus) and so, potentially, there is much to be learned from him.

The remains of Book 1 are very scanty and difficult to understand. Its topic seems to be the question of whether the hearing or the mind judges the quality of poetry.<sup>43</sup> The second book discusses questions of genre (the Pythian Nome, in which the poems depicted Apollo's victory over the Python, is handled in some detail) and some, more technical, aspects of λέξις (language) and poetry: the definitions of *lexis* (col. 36), metaphor (col. 40), and a discussion of στενὰ φωναί (narrow sounds, col. 27).<sup>44</sup>

Of great interest is Demetrius's mention of a πραγματικὴ ζήτησις, or "investigation into the facts."<sup>45</sup> He uses the same phrase in his treatise on the textual criticism of Epicurus's works at *P.Herc.* 1012, col. 46.3–6, in a discussion of the rational part of the soul: ὥς καὶ τούτου πραγματικὴν τὴν ζήτησιν ἔχοντος κα[ὶ] κατὰ λόγον ("since this [sc. part of the soul] has the capacity to investigate into facts and rationally"). The phrasing is drawn from Epicurus's distinction between researches about language alone and those about facts (cf. DL 10.34). His use of the phrase in *On Poems* shows that poetry was an object of Epicurean research into facts. The idea that poetry could be an object of research should not be surprising by now, and that poems are considered things rather than pure language is not, after a moment of reflection, particularly surprising either: poems can be analyzed for their propositional contents (as hinted at above) or for their verbal beauty, but even verbal beauty is not "pure language."

Demetrius has several other potentially interesting but, as yet, poorly understood positions about genre and perhaps the intelligibility of poems. A phrase of his, ἐντροχάζουσα κοινότης "occurring commonality" picks out

the feature, or collection of features, which grants a poem its genre. In Demetrius's example, it is the Pythian Nome:

*On Poems* II col. 49.1–10<sup>46</sup>

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1<br/>[ἐ-]<br/>πὶ διαταCιν<br/>[.]η[.]ν<br/>καὶ ἐπὶ τῇν<br/>ἐνκλιCιν ἦ<br/>τοιαύτην<br/>κατάCτα-</p> <p>5 Cιν<sup>ν</sup> διὰ τῇν<br/>ἐντρο-<br/>χάζουCαν<br/>κοινότητα,<br/>ὅθεν δὴ καὶ τὰ<br/>τοιαῦ-<br/>τα τῶν<br/>ποιημά[τω]ν,<br/>ἃ ἦ γράφουσιν<br/>οἱ γραμ-</p> <p>10 μα[τικοὶ] ἦ<br/>ἐυρίCκου[C]ν</p> | <p>... for tension (adjective missing) and for vocal modulation or such a situation. Because of the occurring commonality, from which very thing ... such poems, which the <i>grammatikoi</i> either write or discover ...</p> |
|---|--|

and col. 51.4–8

- 4 [λέ-] ...they are called poems because of the  
γεῖται ποιήματα occurring commonality throughout the Nome  
διὰ genre.  
τὴν κατὰ τ[ὸν  
Ν]όμον  
ἐντροχαζού[ς] α[ν]  
κοινό-  
8 τητα.

The previous editor, Costantina Romeo, took *κοινότης* to mean ambiguity or vagueness (in contrast with *ιδιότης* “precision” or specificity). But the word in the sense of “commonality” (derived from a set of features or characteristics in common) is equally Epicurean and when Demetrius wants to say “the ambiguity or lack of clarity that occurs,” he says so.<sup>47</sup> All this is evidence not only of a discussion of individual genres, but a theory of genre in which the identifying features had been worked out, and generally, for a technical language developed for literary criticism.

There are several terms which are problematic owing to the poor quality of the text. *ἀνυπότακτος*, however, is surely to be understood in reference to Epicurean linguistic practice, especially the demand at *Ep. Hdt.* 37, that we understand what is arrayed beneath (*τὰ ὑποταγμένα*) our utterances (*φθόγγοι*). Only in this way will we be able to make reliable, well-founded judgments about the world:

*On Poems* II.45.2–11

- 2 ... it is difficult to understand<sup>48</sup> *anhypotakta* poems.  
 [ἀ- In fact, the poems of Polydeuces and Europhronides,  
 νυπότακτα though some are incoherent and false, plainly  
 πορή[μα- signify, but generally they are not *anhypotakta* . . .  
 τα δυσκολον  
 μ[ἐν διαι-
- 5 ρεῖν. και  
 □[γ]ᾶρ□ τὰ  
 Π[ολυδεύ-  
 κουC καὶ τὰ  
 Εὐφρονονιδου  
 διηρημένα  
 μέν τι-  
 να καὶ  
 ψευδῆ  
 προφα-  
 νῶC]  
 Cημαίνει, <sup>v</sup>  
 καθό-
- 10 λ]φου δ' οὐκ  
 ἔστιν ἄνω-  
 πτακτ[ᾶ..  
 ()]φ[.]α

In *Ep. Hdt.* 37, *ta hypotetagmena* stand for the *prolēpseis* which stand behind our utterances. Here, the *anhypotakta* poems are perhaps those without any meaning derivable from the text. The context is broken, but Demetrius may be saying that Polydeuces and Euphronides wrote poems that were difficult to understand, but which signify in some way. This is not a demand for historically or factually accurate poetry, but rather poetry that is intelligible and is not nonsense.<sup>49</sup>

With Demetrius, we finally have substantial remains of an Epicurean author treating poetry, and it seems that he had access to developed theories

about poetry: not only did he investigate poetry through the *pragmatikē zētēsis*, but he had a theory of genre, discussed the importance of communicating some meaning in poetry, and could discuss individual poetic and rhetorical techniques in some detail.

## PHILODEMUS

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Philodemus of Gadara's interest in the fine arts is made obvious by the effort he spent on them: five books *On Poems*, four *On Music*, and at least eight *On Rhetoric*.<sup>50</sup> In *On Poems*, he is concerned mostly to refute mistaken doctrines about poetry, for example, those of the *kritikoi* (euphonist critics) who are the subject of Books 1 and 2. There is no positive exposition of doctrine. Instead, Philodemus's opinions are revealed through occasional positive statements, often in asides, and through his refutations of opposing positions. This state of affairs means that he assumes that his audience has read or heard an earlier exposition of doctrine, either from his own lectures, or by reading Zeno's *On the Utility of Poetry* or Metrodorus's *On Poems*. Similarly, the lack of a purpose statement is probably due to the damaged state of the beginning of the first book.<sup>51</sup>

Thanks to the relatively large amount of surviving text and despite the lack of an explicit statement of purpose, we can discuss Philodemus's motives for writing the treatise. In the first instance, almost the entirety of the *On Poems* is dedicated to refuting opponents' incorrect views about poetry, specifically their views about what makes poetry good. But it is interesting to note that many of these views touch on larger issues. For example, the *kritikoi* hold that poetry entertains solely through its sounds or formal features. These views entail that the communicative content of poetry is irrelevant to the judgment of a poem. These views undermine the power of language by allowing it to say less than the words apparently mean. On the other end of the spectrum, Crates of Mallos's *sphairopoiia* ("sphere-making") involves over-interpreting the text and importing ideas which do not belong, while also judging it on the basis of its phonic qualities divorced from the meaning: he "tears the language away from the contents" (cf. *On Poems* 5.28.33–29.7) and makes it mean too much.<sup>52</sup>

Neither approach to poetry can be approved of because of the implications for philosophy of language, though this is not the only objection to either group.

Because of the comparatively large amount of text which survives and its intractability, I can only provide an outline of his key ideas.<sup>53</sup> The art (*technē*) of poetry is the craft of writing poetry or poems, which were understood to be language communicating ideas in a form in which no prose author would set them. Content (*ὑποτεταγμένη διάνοια*, underlying thought) and form mutually affect each other and, if one is changed, the other changes as well. A suggestive passage in *On Rhetoric* 3 probably indicates that poetic form in conjunction with its content produces entertaining thoughts in the audience. Poems are not mimetic (at least in any interesting way) and genre, while real, is not particularly relevant to the judgment of poems. Poetry *qua* poetry is not useful, but its content might conceivably be useful or harmful—but no poet has ever written a useful poem. Prose is a better medium for arguments, since poetic form, festival context, and music, *inter alia*, distract the audience from the contents of arguments.

The point about utility is worth dwelling on for a moment. There are two crucial statements. The first is that poems *qua* poems do not aid either in language or in content; the second is the claim that “no poet has written poems containing such thoughts nor could they ever.”<sup>54</sup> The second might be an ad hoc point mocking the Stoic critic whom Philodemus is rebutting at that point in the argument, but the first statement stands: poems as such do not help their audiences. Their actual contents might be helpful or harmful, but poetic form is irrelevant to that question.

The difference between Epicurus and Philodemus is not one of doctrine so much as of attitude. At no point can it be demonstrated that Philodemus is innovating doctrinally, though this may be because of the accidents of transmission. His attitude towards poetry, however, is much friendlier. Another important difference is that, while Epicurus criticized the claims that people made on behalf of poetry’s educational value, Philodemus is criticizing people who misinterpret and misjudge it. It is clear that a complete account of poetry underpins Philodemus’s discussion, and we can find in Philodemus traces of critical positions that anticipate New Criticism



(in his tight link between form and content) and reader-response criticism, in the importance he places on the audience's own *dianoiai*, or thoughts.<sup>55</sup>

## PHILODEMUS'S POEMS

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One of the most immediately striking aspects of Philodemus's poetry is its *non-engagement* with Epicurean philosophy. To be sure, some poems rely on a knowledge of Epicurean thought for the audience to get the point, but here philosophy serves poetry.<sup>56</sup> That this was a minor part of Philodemus's poetic project is revealed by the fact that more poems (including the incipits in *P.Oxy.* LIV 3724) refer to his Italian, Neapolitan context than to his Epicureanism.<sup>57</sup> It is clear that what we read now and the picture we draw of Philodemus's poetic production is due very much to Philip of Thessalonika's editorial choices when he formed his *Garland*; equally, it is certain that Philodemus did not write doctrinal poetry in the mode of Lucretius. He did however hew closely to his own strictures for good poems.

The most famous of his poems is the invitation to Piso (27 Sider = 11.44 *AP*):

αὔριον εἰς λιπὴν σε καλιάδα, φίλτατε Πείρων,  
ἐξ ἐνάτης ἔλκει μουσοφιλήσ ἔταρος  
εἰκάδα δειπνίζειν ἐνιαύσιον· εἰ δ' ἀπολείψεις  
οὔθ' αὖτε καὶ Βρομίου Χιογενῆ πρόποσιν,  
ἀλλ' ἐτάρους ὄψει παναληθέας, ἀλλ' ἐπακούσῃ  
Φαιήκων γαίης πολὺ μ' ἐλιχρότερα.  
ἦν δέ ποτε στρέψει καὶ ἐς ἡμέας ὄμματα, Πείρων  
ἄξιον ἐκ λιτῆς εἰκάδα πιστότερην.<sup>58</sup>

Tomorrow, friend Piso, your musical comrade drags you to his modest digs  
at three in the afternoon,  
feeding you at your annual visit to the Twentieth. If you will miss udders  
and Bromian wine *mis en bouteilles* in Chios,  
yet you will see faithful comrades, yet you will hear things far sweeter than  
the land of the Phaeacians.

And if you ever turn an eye to us too, Piso, instead of a modest feast, we shall lead a richer one.

Behind the Epicurean occasion (a feast in honor of Epicurus) and the school in-joke (on the Phaeacian philosophers), it evokes a setting in which a group of Epicurean friends join together at least occasionally. Quite similar are 28 Sider (= 11.35 *AP*) and *P.Oxy.* LIV 3724.vii.8, the first definitely and the second perhaps invitation poems, and his poem on the deaths of Antigenes and Bacchius (29 Sider = 9.412 *AP*), which also has the theme of Epicurean grief in the face of death. It gets its particular effect from the description of preparations for a simple, Epicurean meal, presumably a happy occasion for feasting like those of 27 and 28, but it takes a darker turn at line 5, when Philodemus says that they will not be out on the beach or promontory like they always used to be. Then Sosylus responds that Antigenes and Bacchias were alive and joyous yesterday, but today they will be carried out for burial, and the feast is turned to ash in our mouths as it is revealed that the preparations are for a funeral meal.<sup>59</sup>

But this poem has a hint of parrhesiastic criticism in it: Philodemus is already Piso's "musical comrade," that is, he is in an established patronage relationship (does *ἑταροC* translate *amicus*?), but he needles Piso to pay more attention, and to pay more, to the group. The best livelihood for an Epicurean philosopher, according to Philodemus, is to give lectures on Epicurean philosophy, but what if the students are late with the tuition checks?<sup>60</sup>

Another excellent poem is 4 Sider (= 11.41 *AP*), about his turn to philosophy:

ἑπτὰ τριηκόντεσσιν ἐπέρχονται λυκάβαντες,  
ἤδη μοι βιότου χιζόμεναι σελίδες  
ἤδη καὶ λευκαί με κατασπείρουσιν ἔθειραι  
Ξανθίππη, συνετῆς ἄγγελοι ἡλικίης  
ἀλλ' ἔτι μοι ψαλμός τε λάλος κῶμοι τε μέλονται  
καὶ πῦρ ἀπλήστωι τύφει· ἐνὶ κραδίῃ·  
αὐτὴν ἀλλὰ τάχιστα κορωνίδα γράψατε, Μοῦσαι  
ταύτης ἡμετέρης, δεσπότηδες, μανίης.

Seven years are coming up on thirty; papyrus columns of my life now being torn off; now too, Xanthippe, white hairs besprinkle me, announcing the age

of intelligence; but the harp's voice and revels are still a concern to me, and a fire smolders in my insatiable heart. Inscribe her immediately as the *koronis*, Mistress Muses, of this my madness.<sup>61</sup>

At the age of thirty-seven and beginning to go gray, Philodemus has decided to leave his undergraduate career behind him and settle down. Sider takes this poem as a sort of wedding announcement and points out that precisely thirty-seven was the right age to marry according to Aristotle (*Politics* 1335a26–29) and his intended bride is named Xanthippe, namesake of Socrates's wife. The poignancy of the poem is in its gentle evocation of the inevitable ravages of age: his blood is not as hot, he can't drink as much. He can still have a good time, he insists, but he is slowing down a bit. The wit of the poem is in the gentle jokes about Socrates and Aristotle.

To that poem, we should join the incipit found at *P.Oxy.* LIV 3724.iii.14, ὀκτώκαιδεχέτιν, “An 18-year-old [girl?],” which probably not coincidentally is the age at which Aristotle (*Politics* 1335a26–29) suggested a young woman marry. It is easy to imagine that Philodemus built up an emotionally resonant image in the first epigram, about his increasing age, and then somehow undercut it with a marriage to a much-younger woman, who perhaps was still in the partying phase of life. Alternatively, he could have had the 18-year-old be a perfect match for the older man.

Sider suggested that Philodemus's metrical roughness in 22 (= 5.126 *AP*) is intentional and matches the vulgar tone of the poem:

πέντε δίδωαι ἐνὸς τῇ δεῖναι ὁ δεῖνα τάλαντα  
καὶ βινεῖ φρίσσων καί, μὰ τόν, οὐδὲ καλήν·  
πέντε δ' ἐγὼ δραχμὰς τῶν δώδεκα Λυσιανάσσει  
καὶ βινῶ, πρὸς τῷ, κρείσσονα καὶ φανερώς.  
πάντως ἦτοι ἐγὼ φρένας οὐκ ἔχω ἢ τό γε λοιπὸν  
τοῦς κείνου πελέκει δεῖ διδύμου ἀφελεῖν.

Mr. X gives Mrs. Y five talents for one favor, and he fucks, shivering with fear, one who is, what's more, God knows, no beauty.

I give five drachmas to Lysianassa for the twelve favors,  
and I fuck, what's more, a better woman, and openly.

Assuredly, either I'm crazy or, after all this, he should cut his balls off with an axe.

The epigram as a whole shows signs of careful composition: *πέντε* begins ll. 1 and 3; *καὶ βιν-* begins ll. 2 and 4. The incomplete oath *μὰ τόν* in l. 2 is balanced by the incomplete phrase *πρὸς τῷ* in l. 4. Correption and hiatus in *δεῖναι ὅ* suggest the halting, jerky conjunction of people. In general, the first two distichs are very balanced and information is given in first or second line of the first distich is found in the same line of the second distich. In the final line, *τοῦς κείνου πέλεκει* ends on an indistinct note of menace before the full weight of the statement is revealed in the second half of the pentameter.

The metrical irregularities of the first line are the word division in the first hemistich (violations of Meyer's First and Second Laws), correption of *δεῖναι* before *ὅ*, and the violation of Hermann's bridge at the same place; the form of *δεῖναι* additionally is solecistic (intended to emphasize the fact that the other party is a woman). Here, the shaky and jerky effect of the rhythm enacts the shaky and jerky behavior and actions (*βινεῖ φρίσσων*) of Mr. X. The quality of the meter picks up when "Philodemus," the narrator, speaks about himself, becoming as smooth and suave as his actions. Of the two correptions in l. 5, the first is not worrisome, but the second is less easily explained. It may have but to do perhaps with the possibility, voiced by "Philodemus," that he has lost his mind, or with the same motion at issue throughout the poem. The parallel structures emphasize the parallel situations shared by "Mr. X" and "Philodemus," but the differences in metrical practice show their differing degrees of confidence.

In short, Philodemus's poetry shows his concerns for good content housed in good form (note his usually Callimachean metrics) which, taken together, were to be suggestive of further thoughts in his audience. He wrote about philosophy, but not only Epicurean philosophy, and, in accord with his belief that poetry cannot be useful, none of his poems is didactic.

## ..... **LUCRETIUS**

Titus Lucretius Carus wrote a didactic epic expounding Epicurean physics, possibly complete in six books.<sup>62</sup> The incongruity of an Epicurean writing poetry to promote Epicureanism motivated interest in Epicurean poetics, resulting in most of the views canvassed above at the start of this chapter.

Although the apparent incongruity has now disappeared—at least on Asmis's and my view—it remains in a different form: Lucretius was not violating a ban on writing poetry, but his use of poetry as a medium for Epicurean protreptic is still surprising.

Lucretius, as he shows in a famous passage, believes that poetic form can be useful in the service of Epicurean philosophy (1.931–50):

primum quod magnis doceo de rebus et artis  
religionum animum nodis exsolvere pergo,  
deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida pango  
carmina musaeo contingens cuncta lepore  
id quoque enim non ab nulla ratione videtur  
sed veluti pueris absinthia taetra medentes  
cum dare conantur, prius oras pocula circum  
contingunt mellis dulci flavoque liquore  
ut puerorum aetas improvida ludificetur  
labrorum tenuis, interea perpotet amarum  
absinthii laticem deceptaque non capiatur  
sed potius tali pacto recreata valescat  
sic ego nunc, quoniam haec ratio plerumque videtur  
tristior esse quibus non est tractata, retroque  
volgus abhorret ab hac, volui tibi suaviloquenti  
carmine Pierio rationem exponere nostram  
et quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle,  
si tibi forte animum tali ratione tenere  
versibus in nostris possem, dum perspicis omnem  
naturam rerum, qua constet compta figura.<sup>63</sup>

(sc. I deserve garlands) ... first because my teaching is of high matters, and I proceed to unloose the mind from the tight knots of superstition; next because the subject is so obscure and the lines I write so clear, as I touch all with the Muses' grace. For even this seems to happen not for no reason, but just as when physicians try to administer bitter wormwood to children, they first touch the rims of the cups with the sweet yellow fluid of honey, so that unthinking childhood be deluded as far as the lips, and meanwhile may drink up the bitter juice of wormwood, and though beguiled be not betrayed, but rather by such means be restored and regain health, so now do I, since this doctrine commonly seems somewhat harsh to those who have not used it, and the people shrink back from it, I have chosen to set forth my doctrine to you in sweet-speaking Pierian song, and as it were to touch it with the Muses' delicious honey, if by chance by such a reason I might hold your mind in my verses, while you are learning to see in what shape the whole nature of things is framed.

Lucretius reverses Epicurus's criticism of poetry and uses the deceptive power of poetry for a good end. And just as honey is ultimately useful in treating children, Lucretius the philosophical therapist is licensed to deceive

his audience a bit for their own good. Of course, this means his poem stands as a response to the challenge implicit in Philodemus's claim that no poet would ever write a useful poem. As Bailey noted, Lucretius is in his own view primarily a philosopher, and he treats poetry, as Gale argues, as a "mere vehicle or adjunct" to philosophy which draws its utility secondhand from the utility of the philosophy it contains.<sup>64</sup> Lucretius's project is philosophical education and his means are poetry.

Although a contemporary of Philodemus, Lucretius departs from his opinions in an interesting way. Philodemus had denied that poetry *qua* poetry was useful, and had given reasons that no poet had ever written, or could ever write, a poem containing useful contents: (i) no poem *qua* poem is useful, (ii) poetic form is distracting, and so (iii) prose is the medium for arguments.<sup>65</sup>

Lucretius describes and defends his project with the famous "honeyed cup" simile, quoted above, but it is not clear that he meets the challenge. We can imagine a dialogue:

PHILODEMUS: Poetry *qua* poetry is useless.

LUCRETIUS: I grant that what is most useful in my poem are the argumentative contents, but the poetic form will make people read those arguments, who otherwise would not have. In fact, poetic form can be illustrative of the doctrines: puns like "*ignis in lignis*" illustrate the concept of atoms and objects.

PHILODEMUS: This kind of play in poetic form is seductive, but it merely distracts from the contents.

LUCRETIUS: On the contrary, this sort of thing makes my audience pay attention to contents which they wouldn't care about otherwise.

PHILODEMUS: Perhaps so, but how can you write a convincing argument in verse? Prose is the only good medium for making arguments.

Lucretius now has two possible responses, besides admitting that he is not really an Epicurean acting sincerely:<sup>66</sup>

1. Lucretius: My goal is not really to convince people right away, but to lure them to read the prose technical works; the beauty of my

poetry will lure them, but unlike Epicurus's "destructive lure of myths," mine is a helpful lure of truth.<sup>67</sup>

or:

2. Lucretius: You are simply wrong to claim that it is impossible to write a convincing argument in verse; just learn Latin, read my poem, and you'll see for yourself.<sup>68</sup>

The first option implies a serious division in doctrine (and tactics) between Philodemus and Lucretius. Philodemus firmly denies the possibility of just the kind of poetry Lucretius did in fact write, but we know from Philodemus himself (and other sources) that there were heterodox groups of Epicureans. Despite geographical and chronological proximity, Lucretius and Philodemus may have held different views.<sup>69</sup> But if he was just trying to get them to read Epicurus, would it not be better to write a thoroughly enjoyable and pleasant poem, rather than one with difficult and potentially boring argumentative passages? Accordingly, arguments that Lucretius in some way deliberately used bad or incomplete arguments should be avoided, since they do not do justice to the claims of real utility that Lucretius makes throughout his work. This view simply admits that the bitter wormwood is not really curative at all, that another medicine is necessary.

The second option seems more in line with Lucretius's apology in the honeyed-cup metaphor: the honey is to the poetic form as the wormwood is to the arguments; but the argumentative medicine must be good to have any effect. This better explains the long technical passages. If he simply wanted to seduce readers into trying their hand at Epicurus's own works, why include so much difficult, abstruse, and perhaps boring material? They must serve his end of winning converts to the truth one way or another, and giving them a pleasant start down that road is a good way to do it.

Another fascinating aspect of Lucretius's poetics is his analogy between atoms and letters.<sup>70</sup> In brief, just as atoms join together to form compounds and then other larger bodies, so letters join together to form words, which join together to form statements. He illustrates this (1.907–14) with the example of *lignum* and *ignis*, words which contain many of the same letters.



A change in the choice of letters or their position will change the word just as surely as a change in constituent atoms or their position would change a physical object. Diels suggests that this formed an aspect of Democritus's poetics, for whom Homer's poetic achievement was an ἔπειων κόσμος παντοίων ("kosmos of all kinds of words," fr. B 21 DK) in which *kosmos* is to be understood as a unified, carefully constructed, complete creation.<sup>71</sup> The analogy probably did not play a role in Epicurus's poetics, although Armstrong suggests that he probably used the analogy in a discussion of language, and that its introduction into Epicurean poetics is later, due to Zeno of Sidon.<sup>72</sup> Philodemus is concerned with metathesis of words as a tool of critical judgment, but not with the atom/letter analogy or metathesis of individual letters, so it seems likely that the innovation is Lucretius's own.

Snyder divides Lucretius's punning into two categories: rhetorical and thematic.<sup>73</sup> The rhetorical puns are like gilding: they adorn the verbal form with echoes of earlier poets, stylistic play, and various sonic or visual effects. Lucretius is licensed to do this by his conception of poetry as adornment for the contents.

The second class, the thematic puns, is used to emphasize points. These puns use similarity of sound and form to emphasize the semantic or conceptual closeness of related words, like *mater* and *materies*, or the distance between them, as at 1.891–92, where *in lignis . . . ignis* incisively mocks Anaxagoras's position that there were seeds of fire in wood while at the same time pointing out that the same *elements* make up both wood and fire: fire is in wood after all, just not the way Anaxagoras thought.<sup>74</sup> This class puts poetic play more directly into the service of philosophy by emphasizing the conceptual contents of the poem without sacrificing the more purely esthetic aspects of the rhetorical class.

I wonder if this sort of punning is itself a play on Philodemus's view that metathesis of poetic lines was useless as a critical tool: rearranging lines of verse or transposing them into different meters or swapping synonyms change the line too fundamentally for it to be called "the same."<sup>75</sup> Lucretius points out that, just as all things are just arrangements and rearrangements of the same set of basic *elementa* (atoms), his poem is just arrangements and rearrangements of the same set of basic *elementa* (letters). Accordingly, each poem—including Lucretius's—is its own (*mikros*) *kosmos* (cf.

Democritus fr. B 21 and B 34 DK), and metathesis is useful for poetry after all: on the level of the word, it is a basic precondition for it.

## EPICUREANS AS LITERARY CRITICS

Beyond the poems of Philodemus and Lucretius, we are in possession of two works of Epicurean literary criticism. Neither, however, is literary criticism *stricto sensu*; both deal instead with ethical lessons that can be taught using a literary text as an *aphormē* or “starting point” for discussion.<sup>76</sup> In fact, they demonstrate the principle that the sage can discuss poetry correctly (cf. fr. 569). Further, we should keep in mind the principle put forward in fr. 221, that any philosophical discourse which does not eliminate mental disturbances is useless.<sup>77</sup>

The first is in *P.Herc.* 1570, probably containing the second book of Philodemus's *On Wealth*, though the relevant part of the discussion is very likely drawn from Epicurus himself. In coll. 11 and 12, there is a summary of a scene in Menander's *Georgos* in which a character makes a long list of complaints about poverty. At the end of the summary, the topic turns to philosophical criticism [*On Wealth II*] col. XII.15–18:

15 “Τίνα γὰρ] πρ(òς) ἔ-  
 κάστην αὐτῶν, ἀπολογητέον,” φη(σὶν) ὁ ἱερός [“ὁ-  
 μοτρ(όπως) περ[ι]αιροῦντ[ι] τὰ ψευδῶς ὑπ’ ἀνθρώπων  
 18 αὐτῇ πρ(ος)τιθέμ[ε]ν[α]· ταῦτ’ οὖν ποιήσομεν.”<sup>78</sup>

“What should one say, against each of these (the accusations)? One must offer a defense,” says the holy man (Epicurus),<sup>79</sup> “in the same way as someone stripping away the things that men have falsely attributed to it (poverty); so this I shall do.”

It is not clear whether Epicurus or Philodemus made the promise at the end of the quotation, and consequently to whom the discussion which follows it should be attributed. The editors argue for Epicurus and I accept their arguments.<sup>80</sup> However, if Philodemus's authorship is accepted, it remains a genuine piece of Epicurean criticism of poetry.

Epicurus's argument will not be a pure defense of poverty (i.e. defending the proposition that it actually provides a good lifestyle) but a series of refutations of the accusations against it, probably by pointing out that poverty and its effects are irrelevant to the good life. An example is in col. 13, in which Epicurus asserts that ([*On Wealth II*] col. 13.7–12):

ὁ γὰρ τ[ρ]όπος τὸ ἀπαρρησίαστον καὶ ταπεινὸν ἐπιφέρει, οὐχ ἡ πενία. ἀλλ' ἐὰν ἐμ  
πενία(ι) τις ἀκέραιος καὶ ἀδιόπτωτος ᾖ, πολὺ ἄλλοι μᾶλλον καὶ παρρησίαν ἔχει καὶ ἀκα-  
ταφρόνητός (έστιν).

It is a man's character that brings on lack of free speech and humility, not his poverty: but if he is pure and faultless in poverty, he has much greater freedom of speech and is much more difficult to despise.

Menander had probably said (12.10–11) that poverty “makes such a man unfree of speech” (ἀπαρρησίαστον, οἰοντο[....] ποιεῖ τὸν τοιοῦτον). In general, Epicurus will admit that poverty does make life hard, but he denies that many of the criticisms of it are correctly targeted. But what interests us is Epicurus's use of Menander, a *synephebe* (therefore exact contemporary) of his, as a starting point for a discussion of philosophy.

As almost always, not much survives of the discussion, but we can safely make several claims: Epicurus does not bother with the artistic qualities of the play but concentrates on the accusations leveled against poverty, that is to say, its intellectual contents. That is, Epicurus does not engage in literary criticism by criticizing the literary merits of the play, but rather argues against the ethical attitudes that it displays. Of course, he did not need Menander to argue about these topics. He may have simply found in the *Georgos* a complete list of the topics he wanted to discuss, but he could have simply extracted them and stripped them of their poetic setting if he had wanted to. It seems that Epicurus found it worthwhile to deal the cultural authority of poetry an implied blow while criticizing the content (*not* the artistic merits) of a recent work by a famous, successful poet.<sup>81</sup>

The second work of Epicurean literary criticism to be examined here is Philodemus's *On the Good King According to Homer*.<sup>82</sup> This work takes the poems of Homer as a starting point for drawing ethical lessons for Piso and the (Epicurean parts of the) Roman aristocracy more generally. Epicurus himself had written an *On Kingship* (frr. 5–6, cf. fr. 557 and *KD* 6–7) and Philonides of Laodicea, a later Epicurean, spent time in the

Seleucid courts of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Demetrius I Soter, so there was some precedent for Philodemus to follow.<sup>83</sup>

Here too the cultural authority of an author is subverted by an Epicurean's criticism of common beliefs. Philodemus argues that some Homeric characters are good examples but others are bad, and he provides readings of scenes with an eye towards ethical instruction. His goal is to provide a discussion of correct practices for the benefit of Piso and his other readers, and Homer's text provides a convenient *aphormē*, starting point, for the discussion, since it was so well known and the subject matter was amenable. This does not mean that Philodemus thought that Homer was any sort of moral authority, only that his text was convenient for Philodemus's purposes. Apollonius's *Argonautica* could have served the same end. The message, however, is still ethical and the poetry is still just a starting point for ethical discussion. In fact, in both cases, the philosophy could have happened without the poetry.<sup>84</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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I hope to have laid out, at least in summary, what there is to know about the Epicurean school's engagement with poetry throughout much of its history. Initially, Epicurus was critical of poetry due to its outsize importance in the educational curriculum of the day, which was only distracting at best and did not help anyone arrive at the philosophical truths which he could provide. But that does not mean that poetry was not studied within the school: Metrodorus dedicated a treatise in at least two books which at least touched on the topics of poetry as a *technē* and the education of poets. Colotes in the next generation was able to use the *prolēpsis* of poetry as a paradigm case, indicating that at least that much was uncontroversial within the school. Zeno of Sidon probably criticized poetry as useless, and his contemporary Demetrius Laco discussed some aspects in great detail, and provides evidence for Epicurean thought on genre, the importance of meaning, and specific rhetorical effects. With Philodemus, a nearly complete theory of poetry comes into view, though his own poems are not particularly Epicurean in substance. Lucretius remains a special case. Due to the fragmented nature of our sources, we can only attribute views to

those first known to have held them, but my suspicion is that the views found in Philodemus were fully formed, or nearly so, in the first generation of the school, probably in Metrodorus's *On Poems*. Rare examples of Epicurean literary criticism, such as those found in the discussion of Menander in [Philodemus]'s [*On Wealth* II] and his *On the Good King According to Homer* focus on ethical lessons, either directly rebutting false views found in the poetry under question, or mining the poems for examples of positive behavior.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Jeff Fish and Kirk Sanders for their advice; David Armstrong and Richard Janko for reading drafts, talking over problems, and their support; and Phillip Mitsis for his help and leadership. Jeff, David, and Richard made unpublished work available to me, for which I am grateful. Much of the material in this essay is found in ch. 2 of my forthcoming book. Fragments of Epicurus are quoted from Usener's edition (1887).

<sup>2</sup> For the story, see Diogenes Laertius's citation of the scholarch Apollodorus, the "Tyrant of the Garden," at 10.2. For theological criticism of poetry, see Obbink, *Philodemus and Poetry*; and for the relationship between discipleship and autodidacticism in Epicureanism, see Erler, "Autodidact and Student."

<sup>3</sup> Cf., e.g., Plato's words, in Ion's mouth at *Ion* 531c1–d2.

<sup>4</sup> Atherton, "Hand over Fist" discusses Stoic rhetoric. Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara* is an excellent source for Epicurean and Stoic musicology. See Chandler in this volume for Epicurean rhetoric.

<sup>5</sup> Tescari, *Lucrezio*; Giancotti, "La poetica epicurea in Lucrezio, Cicerone, ed altri."

<sup>6</sup> Boyancé, *Lucrèce et l'épicurisme*, 57–68.

<sup>7</sup> De Lacy and De Lacy, *Philodemus: On Methods of Inference: A Study in Ancient Empiricism*, 140.

<sup>8</sup> De Lacy and De Lacy, *Philodemus: Methods of Inference*, 190.

<sup>9</sup> Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemos*, 8: "Daß aber weder er (= Kolotes) noch Metrodoros in den Schriften des Demetrios und Philodemos *Περὶ ποιημάτων* erscheinen, erklärt sich daraus, daß der spätere Epikureismus unter dem Einfluß der Stoa seine ablehnende Stellung in vielen Punkten aufgab." Classen, "Poetry and Rhetoric in Lucretius," 110–11 summarized the debate and pointed out the differences between study of poetry as part of the *ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία*, its enjoyment as part of the pleasant life, and its use to publicize or publish Epicurean doctrine on the other, but he did not stake new positions in the debate.

<sup>10</sup> Schmid, "Review of Tescari, *Lucrezio* 1939," 12–15.

<sup>11</sup> Waszink, *Lucretius and Poetry*.

<sup>12</sup> Philippson (*RE* s.v. Philodemos 2479).

<sup>13</sup> Asmis, "Epicurean Poetics," 21–22.

<sup>14</sup> Arrighetti, "Gli epicurei, la poesia e Lucrezio."

<sup>15</sup> To Apelles fr. 117 (apud Athenaeus XIII, 588a, and Plutarch, *Non Posse* 1094d) and *Ep. Pyth.* fr. 163 (apud DL 10.6, Plut. *De Poetis Audiendis* 15d, *Non Posse* 1094d; and Quint. *IO* 12.2.24). There is probably a note of scorn in fr. 164 (Plutarch's report, *Non Posse* 1094d, of a letter to Pythocles): *Πυθοκλέους δέ πάντες καὶ ᾄσαι δέονται δι' Ἐπικούρου καὶ ἀντιβολοῦσιν, ὥπως οὐ ζηλώσει τὴν ἐλευθέραν καλουμένην παιδείαν* ("All the men and women beg Pythocles, through Epicurus, and entreat him not to be eager for the so-called 'liberal' education"). At *Ep. Pyth.* 85, "genuine" (*γνήσιος*) *physiologia* is contrasted with the liberal arts (*τὰ ἐγκύκλια*), to the discredit of the latter.

<sup>16</sup> Both phrases, the first found in Heraclitus's *Allegories of Homer* 4 (= fr. 229) and the second in Plutarch, *Non Posse* 1086f (= fr. 228), may be Epicurus's own.

<sup>17</sup> SE *Math.* 1.299: τὰ μὲν οὖν τῶν ἄλλων λεγόμενα κατὰ τὸν τόπον, καὶ μάλιστα τῶν Ἐπικουρείων, ἐστὶ τοιαῦτα. The arguments are at 1.279–98. Blank (*Sextus Empiricus Against the Grammarians*, 286 and introduction §6) suggests that Sextus’s source is a treatise by Zeno of Sidon; that the arguments treated here are genuinely Epicurean is argued by Blank on pp. 296–97. For other treatments of these arguments, see Asmis, “Epicurean Poetics,” 25–6; and Beer, *Lukrez und Philodem*, 77–78. If Sextus’s source is Zeno, it will be the *Περὶ ποιημάτων χρήσεως* “On the Use of Poetry.”

<sup>18</sup> Blank, *Sextus Empiricus Against the Grammarians*, 298–301, suggests that only the Epicurean sage can safely read poetry: since only he is immune to being taken in by its bad sentiments, he alone can allow himself the lesser good of aural pleasure without running the risk of losing the greater good of freedom from the pain caused by false beliefs.

<sup>19</sup> οὐδεμία ἡδονὴ καθ’ αὐτὴν κακόν· ἀλλὰ τὰ τινῶν ἡδονῶν ποιητικὰ πολλαπλασίους ἐπιφέρει τὰς ὀχλήσεις τῶν ἡδονῶν.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. SV 51 (an extract from a letter from Metrodorus to Pythocles): πυνθάνομαί σου τὴν κατὰ σάρκα κίνησιν ἀφρονωτέραν διακεῖσθαι πρὸς τὴν ἀφροδισίῳ ἐντεῦξιν. σὺ δέ, εἰ μὴ τοὺς νόμους καταλύεις μήτε τὰ καλῶς ἔθει κείμενα κινεῖς μήτε τῶν πλησίον τινὰ λυπεῖς μήτε τὴν σάρκα καραξαίνεις μήτε τὰ ἀναγκαῖα καταναλίσκες, χρῶ ὥς βούλει τῇ σεαυτοῦ προαιρέσει. ἀμήχανον μέντοι γέ τὸ μὴ οὐχ ἐνί γέ τινι τούτων συνέχεσθαι· ἀφροδίσια γὰρ οὐδέποτε ὤνησεν, ἀγαπητὸν δὲ εἰ μὴ ἔβλαψεν (“You tell me that the movement of your flesh is too inclined towards sexual intercourse. So long as you do not break the laws or disturb proper and established conventions or distress any of your neighbors or ravage your body or squander the necessities of life, act upon your inclination in any way you like. Yet it is impossible not to be constrained by at least one of these. For sex is never advantageous but a fine thing if it does no harm”). I follow the text and translation of Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* 2.120 and 1.116, except the last clause, which I understand following Purinton, “Epicurus on the Telos”; and Brennan, “Epicurus on Sex, Marriage, and Children.”

<sup>21</sup> Fr. 181 shows his practice and reason: βρυάζω τῷ κατὰ τὸ σωματίον ἡδέϊ, ὕδατι καὶ ἄρτῳ χρώμενος, καὶ προσπύω ταῖς ἐκ πολυτελείας ἡδοναῖς οὐ δι’ αὐτὰς ἀλλὰ διὰ τὰ ἔξακολουθοῦντα αὐταῖς δυσχερῆ (“I revel in bodily pleasure using only water and bread, and I spit on the pleasures that come from extravagance—not on their own merits but because of the troubles that follow on them”). Of course, if he could come by something extravagant without trouble, he would not hesitate to enjoy it (fr. 182, to a follower): πέμψον μοι τυροῦ κυθρίδιον ἓν· ὅταν βούλωμαι πολυτελεῦσθαι δύνωμαι “Send me a small pot of cheese, so that I can feast whenever I want.” See also fr. 464 about eating meat.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. SV 45: οὐ κόμπου οὐδὲ φωνῆς ἐργαστικοὺς οὐδὲ τὴν περιμάχητον παρὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς παιδείαν ἐνδεικνυμένου φυσιολογία παρασκευάζει, ἀλλ’ ἀσοβάρους (Leopold: ἀλλὰ σοβαροὺς MS). καὶ αὐτάρκεις καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀγαθοῖς, οὐκ ἐπὶ τοῖς τῶν πραγμάτων μέγα προνοῦντας (“The study of nature does not make people skilled producers of boasts or their own voice nor show-offs of the education that is much fought over among the *hoi polloi*, but instead humble and self-sufficient and proud of their own good qualities rather than their own good possessions”).

<sup>23</sup> Giancotti and Boyancé argued over the exact interpretation of the phrase *in poetis evolvendis . . . in quibus nulla solida utilitas . . . est*. I side with Boyancé in thinking that it means “in reading poets, in whom (generally, as a rule) there is no solid utility” rather than “in reading [sc. only those] poets, in whom there is . . .” which would require *(iis) poetis*. For discussions of Epicurean opinions about music, see Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara*, esp. pp. 91–113 and for geometry and mathematics, see Sedley, “Epicurus and the Mathematicians of Cyzicus.” Cosmology and several astronomical phenomena are handled at length in *Ep. Pyth.* 88–98: the constitutions of the sun, moon, and stars, their movements (including the solstices) and apparent changes (the phases of the moon,

eclipses) and the changing length of days and the seasons. In short, to say that the Epicureans did not care at all about these topics is a misrepresentation.

<sup>24</sup> Note the perceptive comment of Wigodsky, “The Alleged Impossibility of Philosophical Poetry,” 60 n. 13: “That the following statement (fr. 568) was drawn from a different context is implied by the use of  $\tau\epsilon$  rather than  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ ; Usener prints the two statements, in reverse order, as two fragments (fr. 569 and 568).” I have no firm suggestion as to their origin, but the *Diaporiai*, from which fr. 20 is drawn, is a possibility.

<sup>25</sup> Asmis, “Epicurean Poetics,” 22 and 32–33; the statement is often taken to be a categorical prohibition of Epicurean involvement with poetry or, at least, of their writing poetry. See, contra, Arrighetti “Gli epicurei, la poesia e Lucrezio,” 70, who cites and (partially) translates fr. 2:  $\eta\delta\epsilon\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\alpha\kappa\alpha\iota\eta\epsilon\upsilon\phi\rho\omicron\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\nu\eta\kappa\alpha\tau\grave{\alpha}\kappa\acute{\iota}\nu\eta\kappa\iota\nu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\rho\gamma\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha\iota\beta\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\pi\omicron\nu\tau\alpha\iota$  “nella loro realtà, nel loro verificarsi . . . di fatto.” But he had previously translated it as “dalla loro attività” (*Epicuro: Opere*, 161). There are at least two possible lines of interpretation: 1. reading  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\rho\gamma\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha\iota$  as a nominative in apposition: “Joy and happiness are understood to be intense activities in motion”; 2. taking  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\rho\gamma\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha\iota$  as a dative and follow his older translation (“by their practice,” i.e. by practicing them) and understanding with, e.g. Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, 373–94 or Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 123–24, that kinetic pleasures practiced responsibly and in good conscience often do in fact somehow make up an important part of the Epicurean’s life.

<sup>26</sup> Philosophy: fr. 219:  $\tau\eta\nu\phi\iota\lambda\omicron\varsigma\omicron\phi\iota\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\rho\gamma\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\iota\varsigma\kappa\alpha\iota\delta\iota\alpha\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\varsigma\mu\omicron\iota\varsigma\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu\epsilon\upsilon\delta\alpha\acute{\iota}\mu\omicron\nu\alpha\beta\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\pi\omicron\iota\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\alpha\nu$  (“[sc. he said that] philosophy is an activity which achieves the happy life by arguments and discussions”). Additionally, other Epicureans do not use the word (and its cognates) lightly: Polystratus *On Contempt* 11.1, Philodemus [*On Choices and Avoidances*] 22.10, *On Anger* 26.17. It is, however, used more generically at *On Arrogance* 21.15 (“activities, occupation”).

<sup>27</sup> See below for discussion, and see note 92 for bibliography.

<sup>28</sup> They start at B.49.27 (p. 145 Longo Auricchio) and B<sup>1</sup>.21.10 (p. 215 Longo Auricchio; this part of Philodemus’s *On Rhetoric* II is preserved in two rolls, which are given the arbitrary designations B and B<sup>1</sup> and their columns are numbered sequentially within each papyrus, so B<sup>1</sup> col. 21 comes from later in the work than B col. 49). Metrodorus’s fragments were collected by Körte *Metrodori Epicurei Fragmenta*; fr. 20–23 are from the *On Poems*.

<sup>29</sup> See *On Rhetoric* II, *P.Herc.* 1672, col. 22.28–39 (p. 219 Longo Auricchio); at *On Rhetoric* III, col. xlviii.33–5 (Hammerstaedt) lessons in poetry are mentioned.

<sup>30</sup> I print Sudhaus’s subjunctive in l. 27 in place of the indicative on the papyrus, and alter the editors’ punctuation. I understand  $\tau\acute{\omicron}\acute{\epsilon}\phi\acute{\epsilon}\xi\eta\varsigma$  as the object of  $\theta\eta\rho\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\iota$  (with Longo Auricchio), and compare  $\tau\acute{\omicron}\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\nu\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu$  “the important thing” for its meaning (see *LSJ* s.v.  $\kappa\upsilon\nu\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega$  3).

<sup>31</sup> Chandler, *Philodemus On Rhetoric Books 1 and 2: Translation and Exegetical Essays*, 117–22.

<sup>32</sup> As the pet names  $\text{Κωλωταρᾶν}$  and  $\text{Κωλωτάριον}$  suggest, both attested by Plutarch *Ad. Colotem* 1007e.

<sup>33</sup> Their editions are to be found in Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemus*, in the Nachtrag, pp. 163–67; and see also Mancini, “Sulle opere polemiche di Colote.” Michael Erler is currently re-editing them.

<sup>34</sup> T(abula) and p(agina) stand for “cornice” (the frames that the papyri are stored in) and “column” in Crönert’s numeration. He read  $\mu\eta\langle\tau\acute{\omicron}\rangle$  in line 12, which I consider unnecessary: “what is clear and non-conjectural” taken together as one idea, makes sense, since what is clear for Epicureans is not conjectural.  $\delta\varsigma$  in l. 10 is my supplement; Crönert printed  $\acute{\omicron}$ .

<sup>35</sup> Janko (*per litt.*) conjectured  $\acute{\omicron},\tau\iota$  in line 2 before the preserved text.  $\text{Cημῖνῃ}$  is my correction for Crönert’s reading  $\text{Cημηονῃ}$ ; the construction is a deliberative subjunctive after  $\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota$  (see Smyth §1806).

<sup>36</sup> Concolino Mancini, “Sulle opere polemiche di Colote,” 62, developing suggestions by Körte, “Review of Crönert” 253–54 and Long, “Aisthesis, Prolepsis and Linguistic Theory in Epicurus.” Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemus*, 8 thought that Colotes was reflecting Epicurus’s ban on poetry; Philippson (*RE* 2479–80) points out that this is not necessarily the case.

<sup>37</sup> For Philodemus’s statement, see his *On Poems* 5.30.29–33 and 5.33.33–36. In this connection, Colotes mentions Archilochus at T. IV p. 10b\* l. 7 (p. 164 Crönert, a fragment preserved only on the Oxford *disegno*, where ἀρχιλοχα is to be emended to Ἀρχιλόχῳ/λι, cf. Archilochus fr. 301 West). Because he was a canonical poet, he is often used as a test case in Philodemus’s *On Poems*: at 2.34 alongside Semonides, Hipponax, and Euripides; at 4.104 as a poet who is good despite using insufficiently pleasurable diction; and in 5.17–18 as a poet who is considered good “only with indulgence” by a Stoic literary critic who could not find intellectual contents of any value in his poetry. The discussion here was surely similar: is Archilochus, who slandered others and admitted shameful things about himself in his poems, thereby a *bad poet*? Or is he a good poet who wrote about bad topics? Philodemus clearly comes down in favor of the second option, and Colotes probably did as well. As Concolino Mancini suggests, Archilochus might have been mentioned because his verse κηλέ[ε]ται δ’ ὅτις [βροτ]ῶν ἀοιδάϊς, (“whichever mortal is enchanted by songs,” Phld. *On Music* 4.49.38–39 = fr. 352 West), was compared with the argument in Plato (206b1–2) that poetry should κηλέϊν, enchant, and not ἐξαγριαίνειν, enrage. (ΕΕ is Treu’s emendation of the ω in the Neapolitan *disegno*, West prints a more fragmentary text as fr. 253.)

<sup>38</sup> Its title is mentioned in a list at *P.Herc.* 1005, col. 10.19–20 (= fr. 12 Angeli-Colaizzo): περὶ ποιημάτων χρη[?] [CEWC (χρη[?] τῶν, “On Useful Poems,” is also possible). In the same context, works Περὶ γραμματικῆς (“On Grammar”), Περὶ ἱστορίας (“On History” or perhaps “On Grammatical Inquiry,” as Sbordone, *Philodemi: Adversus [Sophistas]*, 144 suggested), Περὶ παροιμιῶν καὶ ὁμοίων (“On Proverbs and Similes”), and Περὶ λέξεως (“On Language” or “On Style”) are mentioned.

<sup>39</sup> Phld. *On Poems* 5.29.29 mentions a “Zeno” and the discussion constitutes the end of the work. Unfortunately, the section is identified solely as αἱ παρὰ Ζήνωνι δόξαι “The opinions in Zeno,” and what follows is a listing of various opinions, not focused on utility, with summary objections.

<sup>40</sup> Several doctrines found in other philosophers’ works have been ascribed to Zeno. See above on the extracts from Sextus Empiricus about the utility of poetry and below on the atom-letter analogy in Lucretius. Further, two references to a Zeno in Demetrius Laco’s *Textual and Exegetical Problems in Epicurus* (edited by Puglia as *Aporie testuali ed esegetiche in Epicuro*) may indicate some work in that field by him. The name “Zeno” appears at coll. 44.2 and 50.6; in the first he is called ὁ φίλατος Ζήνων, which makes it all but certain that this Zeno is the scholarch, since φίλατος was almost a technical term for referring to fellow Epicureans.

<sup>41</sup> For his biography, see Gigante *apud* Puglia, *Aporie testuali ed esegetiche in Epicuro*.

<sup>42</sup> For Book 2, see Romeo, *Demetrio Lacone: La poesia*, which includes both books along with introduction, Italian translation and commentary, but whose reconstruction of the second book is faulty in some particulars. I re-edited Book 1 in McOskey, “A New Edition of *PHerc.* 188 (Demetrius Laco, *On Poems* I),” and am currently re-editing Book 2. References here are to Romeo’s column and line numbers.

<sup>43</sup> See McOskey, “A New Edition of *PHerc.* 188 (Demetrius Laco, *On Poems* I)” for discussion of the topic and adversaries, who are Andromenides (also known from Philodemus) and possibly Crates of Mallos.

<sup>44</sup> For a preliminary attempt at understanding the structure and topics of *On Poems* II, see McOskey, “Towards a New Edition,” 2. Cf. Phld. *On Poems* 1.104.2–4. Narrow sounds were considered unpleasant and difficult to pronounce by the *Kritikoi*.

<sup>45</sup> For discussion of the term, see Romeo, *Demetrio Lacone: La poesia*, 162, i.e. her note to 2.15.4 onwards. I follow Longo Auricchio's suggestion for the translation (in Romeo).

<sup>46</sup> The text is substantially the same as Romeo, *Demetrio Lacone: La poesia*, though I have succeeded in reading several more traces which make the text more secure. The only major differences are that Romeo prints [χρ]η[CTḥ]ν at the end of line 2, which seems too long for the space, and that I read τῶν ποημά[τω]ν,|ᾶ at 49.8–9 for her τῶν ποημά[τω]ν|ν. See also Romeo, “La testimonianza di Demetrio Lacone sul nomos pitico (*PHerc.* 1014 col. XLVIII).”

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *On Poems* II col. 61.5–10: διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἐν|τροχάζουσαν ἀδηλόγητα περὶ τοῦν γλ[ωC]| CήμαCιν εἴCιν Ἀλκα|οC τε καὶ Cαπφω κ[α]κ[ο]ύ|μCε ν|οι (“for on account of the lack of clarity which obtains, regarding the aspect of rare words, Alcaeus and Sappho have both been abused”). κοινότηC is used twice in *Ep. Hdt.* 58 and only in the plural to mean “common features” as at, e.g., *On Anger* 24.28 and *On Death* 24.8.

<sup>48</sup> The word is uncertainly restored and of uncertain meaning. Note that Mangoni's note ad loc. actually refers to δύCκολον, not διαιρεῖν as written.

<sup>49</sup> It is plainly connected with Philodemus's term ἡ ὑποCταγμένη διάνοια.

<sup>50</sup> On Philodemus's biography, see Dorandi and Capasso in this volume. Previous excellent work on Philodemus's poetics can be found in Greenberg, *The Poetic Theory of Philodemus*; Pace, “Problematiche di poetica in Filodemo”; the articles of Asmis listed in my bibliography; and Obbink, *Philodemus and Poetry*, as well as the editions.

<sup>51</sup> Ancient introductions were much shorter than we are accustomed to; the introductions to Plutarch's works against the Stoics and Epicureans are only about a Teubner page and a half long each.

<sup>52</sup> For a collection of Crates's fragments with detailed commentary, see Broggiato, *Cratete di Mallo: I frammenti*.

<sup>53</sup> See my “On the Good Poem According to Philodemus” for full discussion of details.

<sup>54</sup> Phld. *On Poems* 5.25.30–34: ε{υ} ἴ γάρ {οι} καθὸ πόημα φυσικὸν οὐδὲν οὔτε λέξεωC οὔτε δι[α] γοήματοC, ὠφέλημα π[αρ]αCκευάζει and 5.17.20–24: οὐ γC[γρ]αφ[ό]τοC [τι]νὸC τῶν ποι[η]τῶν τ[οι]αύταC περιέ[χοντ]α π[ο]ήματα διανοίCαC [ο]ὔτ' ἂν γράψοντοC; cf. 5.5.6–11.

<sup>55</sup> For discussion, see Greenberg, *The Poetic Theory of Philodemus*; and Rostagni, *Scritti minori I*, 356–443 who explicitly considers Philodemus a forerunner of Benedetto Croce.

<sup>56</sup> Sider throughout his commentary, *The Epigrams of Philodemos*, takes a related tack and argues that in some poems, Philodemus presents himself as a failed Epicurean.

<sup>57</sup> Being generous, 3, 5, 27, 28, and 29 have to do with philosophical themes, if “loftier thoughts” in 5 is understood as “philosophy” rather than “anything that isn't drunken revelry” and 28 is taken to be the same kind of dinner as in 27. For Roman poems, among the complete poems, only 12, on Flora, is secure, but many from the incipit list probably qualify: iv.14, iv.15, v.29, vi.2, viii.4, and possibly \*iv.25 and \*vii.23.

<sup>58</sup> Epigrams are cited according to Sider's edition and I use his translations.

<sup>59</sup> For another reading of this poem, see Capasso in this volume.

<sup>60</sup> Phld. *On Household Management* 23.23–36 and DL 10.121: χρηματίCεCθαι τε, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ μόνηC σοφίCαC, ἀπορήCαντα (“and he will make money, but only from his wisdom, if he is poor”).

<sup>61</sup> Sider, whose translation I follow, takes the genitives in the last line to depend on κορωνίδα, the mark in a papyrus text that indicates the end of the text (or of a longer poem in stanzas, like many poems of Sappho and Alcaeus): “the finis to this my madness.” Nisbet, in his review of Sider, took them as dependent on δεCπότηδεC: “mistresses of this my madness.”

<sup>62</sup> For a general introduction to Lucretius, see Gale in this volume; here, I will focus on his poetics. I intend to develop these views more elsewhere.



<sup>63</sup> On the many poetic and rhetorical complications of this passage, see Mitsis, “Committing Philosophy on the Reader,” and Gale in this volume. The translation is from Rouse and Smith, *Lucretius On the Nature of Things*, 77–79, with modifications.

<sup>64</sup> Bailey, *Lucretius De Rerum Natura*, 757; and Gale, “Lucretius and Previous Poetic Traditions,” 60 and 72–74.

<sup>65</sup> For (i), cf. Phld. *On Poems* 5.25.30–34 (cited above); for (ii), cf. Phld. *On Music* 4.140.1–14; and for (iii), cf. Phld. *On Music* 4.124.11–21 (it is also an inference drawn on the basis of (i) and (ii): if poetic form is useless and distracting, then prose is the only medium appropriate for philosophy).

<sup>66</sup> Boyancé, *Lucrèce et l'épicurisme*, 59 hints at the possibility: “... si Cicéron pour exposer le système de celle-ci ne se réfère jamais à Lucrèce, une raison à laquelle on n’a peut-être pas songé pourrait être, nous l’avons dit, que les épicuriens désavouaient ce poème comme l’expression autorisée de leur doctrine. Mais Lucrèce, lui, n’avait certainement pas cru faire acte d’hérétique et nous serons de son avis.” But Sallust, his contemporary, translated Empedocles into Latin, and Varro and Egnatius both wrote poems *De rerum natura* (the former is either M. Terentius Varro or Varro Atacinus, the latter is totally unknown and only assumed to postdate Lucretius) without, we presume, being philosophical followers.

<sup>67</sup> Versions of this view have been held by many critics, including Classen, “Poetry and Rhetoric in Lucretius,” 77–118; and Asmis, “Reason and Rhetoric in Lucretius.”

<sup>68</sup> Wigodsky, “The Alleged Impossibility of Philosophical Poetry,” 64–65 provides the basis for my second option here: Philodemus’s previous lack of experience with genuinely useful didactic poetry (i.e. genuinely *Epicurean* didactic poetry) leads him to deny the possibility of it. For a committed empiricist, this is not such a difficult step. On this view, Lucretius simply post-dates Philodemus (or Philodemus did not read Latin), and so Philodemus did not have the empirical grounds for revising his view.

<sup>69</sup> See Sedley, “Epicureanism in the Roman Republic.”

<sup>70</sup> See Armstrong, “The Impossibility of Metathesis,” for a general discussion of the topic and earlier bibliography; and, more recently, Holmes, “‘Daedala Lingua’: Crafted Speech in ‘De Rerum Natura,’” 527–85 and Beer, *Lukrez und Philodem*, esp. 118–26. Armstrong and Oberhelman, “Satire as Poetry and the Impossibility of Metathesis in Horace’s *Satires*” is a practical example.

<sup>71</sup> Diels, *Elementum*, 1–14.

<sup>72</sup> Cic. *ND* 2.93–4 reports Posidonius’s criticisms of Democritus’s letter-atom analogy. Armstrong, “The Impossibility of Metathesis,” 224 suggests that the idea had been recently revived by Zeno.

<sup>73</sup> Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius’ De Rerum Natura*, 144, and see her whole concluding chapter pp. 122–46.

<sup>74</sup> Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius’ De Rerum Natura*, 44 for this example.

<sup>75</sup> This paragraph depends heavily on Armstrong, “The Impossibility of Metathesis,” and I thank him for discussing it with me.

<sup>76</sup> Erler, “*Aphormen labein*.” On Epicurean literary criticism, see most importantly Asmis, “Philodemus’ Poetic Theory and *On the Good King According to Homer*.”

<sup>77</sup> Fr. 221 ap. Porph. *Ad Marc.* 31: *κενὸς ἐκείνου φιλοσόφου λόγος, ὅφ’ οὐ μὴδὲν πάθος ἀνθρώπου θεραπεύεται· ὥστε γὰρ ἰατρικῆς οὐδὲν ὄφελος μὴ τὰς νόσους τῶν σωματίων ἐκβαλλούσης, οὕτως οὐδὲ φιλοσοφίας, εἰ μὴ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐκβάλλει πάθος* (“empty is the discourse of that philosopher, by which no human suffering is healed. For just as there is no help from medicine if it does not drive out the illness of the bodies, thus there is no help from even philosophy, if it does not drive out the suffering of the soul”).

<sup>78</sup> The text follows Armstrong and Ponczoch, “[Philodemus] *On Wealth*,” with additional suggestions communicated to me by David Blank. The dipole in the publication is misplaced (I have double-checked the papyrus), and so the quotation from Epicurus begins at line 15 instead of 16 (my text reflects this).

<sup>79</sup> For this description, cf. fr. 130 from a letter to Idomeneus: πέμπε οὖν ἀπαρχὰς ἡμῖν εἰς τὴν τοῦ ἱεροῦ σῶματοσ θεραπείαν ὑπὲρ τε αὐτοῦ καὶ τέκνων· οὕτω γάρ μοι λέγειν ἐπέρχεται (“So send first fruits to us for the care of our holy body on both your behalf and that of your children. For it occurred to me to speak this way”). See also how Philodemus speaks of his dead teacher Zeno of Sidon at *P.Herc.* 1005, col. 14.6–12: καὶ Ζήνωνοσ ἐγεν[ό]μην περιόν[το]σ τε {α} πις[τ]ῶ[σ] ἐραστῆσ καὶ τ ἐλευ[τήσαν]τοσ ἀκοπίατοσ ὑμνητήσ, μάλιστα πασῶν αὐτοῦ τῶ[ν] ἀρετῶν ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐξ Ἐπικ[ο]ύρου κατρχαῖσ τε καὶ θεοφ[ο]ρίαισ (“and while Zeno was alive, I was a faithful lover of his and, now that he’s dead, and I am untiring singer of hymns in his honor [*hymnētēs*], especially of all his virtues based on his possessions and divine ecstasies [*theophorai*] from Epicurus,”) and the anonymous Epicurean ethical treatise preserved in *P.Herc.* 346 (col. 4.26–27): ὕμνεῖν καὶ τὸν σωτ[ῆ]ρα τὸν ἡμέτερον (“to sing hymns for our savior as well”).

<sup>80</sup> See especially Armstrong and Ponczoch, “[Philodemus] *On Wealth*” 137–8. Armstrong, *per litt.*, adds the argument that the discussion of *parrhēsia* assumes that a poor man actually could stand up and address an assembly, which (he says) was a possibility during Epicurus’s lifetime, but not during Philodemus’s.

<sup>81</sup> Menander wrote over a hundred plays and won eight victories and, after his death, continued to be extremely important in Greek education; papyrus finds of his works are extremely numerous. Because Epicurus and Menander served their *ephebeia* together (according to Strabo 14.1.18), Epicurus wrote his criticism very soon, within decades at the most, after the performance of the play.

<sup>82</sup> Dorandi, *Filodemo: Il buon re secondo Omero* is an edition with Italian translation, commentary, and introduction and contains a useful survey of previous work on the treatise, its context, and the question of Philodemus’s orthodoxy in writing it; Fish, *Philodemus: On the Good King According to Homer* will replace it. See Fish, “Philodemus’ *On the Good King According to Homer*: Columns 21–31” and “On Orderly Symposia in Homer” for new editions of some sections. See also Murray, “Philodemus on the Good King According to Homer” and “Rileggendo *Il buon re secondo Omero*”; Gigante, *Philodemus in Italy*, 63–78.

<sup>83</sup> There is no reason to believe that Philodemus departs doctrinally from what Epicurus will have written in his *On Kingship*, cf. Fish, “On Orderly Symposia in Homer,” 90–91. *P.Herc.* 1044 contains a biography of Philonides and was edited by Gallo, *Studi di papirologia ercolanese*, 59–205.

<sup>84</sup> In this regard, they anticipate Plutarch’s tactics in his *De poetis audiendis*; see Konstan, “The Birth of the Reader.”



PART II

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ANCIENT  
EPICUREANISM AND  
ITS CRITICS

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## CHAPTER 15

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# PHILODEMUS AND THE HERCULANEUM PAPYRI

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MARIO CAPASSO

### PHILODEMUS: FROM GADARA TO HERCULANEUM

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PHILODEMUS was likely born around 121 and 118 BCE<sup>1</sup> in Gadara (Umm Qais), a Palestinian city located roughly 10 km southeast of Lake Gennesaret in what is today Jordan.<sup>2</sup> Very little is known about the history of this city. It was one of the Middle-Eastern areas that witnessed a major diffusion of Greek culture during the Hellenistic period. The motives that led Philodemus to leave Palestine are unknown.<sup>3</sup> The hypothesis put forward by Gigante might be correct: according to him, the Gadaran had left his native country due to the turmoil of its civil wars.<sup>4</sup> What is known is that Philodemus the intellectual went fittingly to Alexandria—an important center for philosophical, scientific, and literary studies<sup>5</sup>—and subsequently to Athens.<sup>6</sup> Philodemus himself recalls this in an important passage of the *History of the Academic Philosophers*, one of the books from his work on

the history of philosophy entitled *Syntaxis tōn Philosophōn*.<sup>7</sup> In Alexandria, the cultural capital of the time and the home of the Library and the Museum, Philodemus was able both to learn from others and to experience directly the extraordinary things that he reports in his *De signis* (De Lacy col. 2.3–18), and for which he is the only source. These things include, for example: the man half a cubit tall with a colossal head, and the pygmies of Acoris, an area in central Egypt;<sup>8</sup> making friends with Stoic and Academic philosophers; and refining his talents as a poet and broadening his education, which subsequently served him in composing the many treatises written after his adoption of Epicureanism.<sup>9</sup>

The passage in the *History of the Academic Philosophers* allows us to uncover a fundamental stage in Philodemus's life and formative education. In a passage from Book 5 of his *On Rhetoric* (Sudhaus 2.145, 1–18), likely written in the second half of the first century BCE, Philodemus lists Alexandria among the group of major cities able to attract philosophers for various reasons.

We do not know exactly when the Gadaran arrived in Athens. In one of his epigrams (AP VI 349),<sup>10</sup> he invokes a series of divinities—among them the Nereids, daughters of Nereus, the ancient god of the sea; Poseidon, the powerful lord of the waters; and Zephyrus, the mildest of winds—so that he may be brought “safely to the sweet shore of the Piraeus” (σῶρον ἐπὶ γλυκερὴν ῥόνα Πειραέως). According to Gigante:

When Philodemus was composing the epigram . . . he was leaving Gadara, the homeland of Meleager, where he had spent his youth in complete veneration of poetry. He was headed to Athens, to the delightful shores of the Piraeus, in order to become a wise man in the Garden of Zeno, who himself had moved from Sidon to Athens. That the verses are not from someone who already professed Epicurean philosophy is apparent to anyone reading with historical perspective, without bias or prejudice. No one could reconcile this prayer, confident in the favor of the gods and rich in mythological doctrine, with an Epicurean theology that isolates the gods in inter-worlds. . . . Lucretius's prayer to Venus was written by a Roman in a time filled with iniquity, and written in order that the philosophy of pleasure would with rhythm and poetic image win over the great Memmius. The prayer is not comparable to Philodemus's epigram, which seeks freedom from the passions that Lucretius firmly dominated when composing his poem, and hopes to find it with the arrival to the delightful Attic land. . . . Such subtle allusion justifies the epithet γλυκερή, which had remained unexplained so far; it was missing the joy of salvation that I here present for the first time.<sup>11</sup>

Gigante’s attribution to the poet of a cognizant, clear will to go to Athens—of which we have no sign whatsoever—and to join Epicureanism and thereby be freed from passions, leaves us bewildered. The attribution of the epithet “sweet” to the shore of Piraeus is, as Gigante himself admits, an element too “subtle” for one to be able to speak of a reference to the “sweetness of the Epicurean message” in Zeno. In a lacunar passage from *De bono rege* (Dorandi col. 30, 2–4), Philodemus speaks of χώρα γλυκεῖα, very likely referring to the land of the Phaeacians. In *De libertate dicendi* (Olivieri col. 21) Philodemus tells of the sage who is able to curb and cure passions, bringing about goods (τὰ καλά) with the exercise of *parrhēsia* while keeping dangerous and licentious desires at bay (ἐπιθυμῖαι πονηρὰ καὶ γλυκύτητες). In Philodemus’s language, therefore, terms for the concept of “sweet” do not necessarily refer to Epicurean philosophy and do not necessarily hold a positive connotation. With γλυκερός, Philodemus might designate the land where he has decided to go in order to change his existence, believing it will offer him a better life: a sort of “promised land.”

In Athens, Philodemus attended the lectures of Zeno of Sidon, who was born around 150 BCE and succeeded Apollodorus as head of the Epicurean school of the city from 110 to 105.<sup>12</sup> Zeno was the scholarch for approximately thirty years. According to the testimony of Philodemus, during Sulla’s siege he was probably sent into exile by the Epicurean dissident Aristion, who, having risen to power, pushed the Athenians towards an impossible resistance by imposing many sacrifices on them.<sup>13</sup> When the city was captured by the Romans, Zeno regained his office, and in 79–78, when he was already old,<sup>14</sup> Cicero and Atticus heard him speak.<sup>15</sup> As strong and systematic an opponent of Epicureanism as Cicero calls Zeno *princeps Epicureorum* and remarks how, in contrast to the majority of adherents to the school, Zeno was in the habit of speaking “in a clear, solemn, elegant fashion,” enough for Cicero to lament that “such a vast intellect” wound up mixing with doctrines lacking any meaning, not to mention useless.<sup>16</sup> It is probable that Zeno’s lectures, which somehow fascinated the Roman orator and political figure, helped Philodemus embrace Epicureanism with conviction. In one of his works (*P.Herc.* 1005/862 Angeli col. 14, 6–12), he confesses to having been a trusty admirer of Zeno while he was alive, and after his death a tireless eulogist of all his virtues conformant with the magniloquence and divine inspiration of

Epicurus.<sup>17</sup> As we learn from the *subscriptiones* of papyri that have been restored to various extents, at least two of Philodemus's works come directly from Zeno's lectures. The first is a work on logic comprised of at least three books, and from the third *P.Herc.* 1389 recovers fragments and part of the final title: (Φιλοδήμου | [Κ]ατ[ὰ] . [ . . . . . ]η [.]εως | Ἐκ τῶν Ζήνωνος σχολῶν | γ'.<sup>18</sup> The second work, *Περὶ ἠθῶν καὶ βίων*, *On Characters and Ways of Life*, discusses ethics, having been composed by the Gadaran on the basis of Zeno's lectures that he reworked and synthesized. *P.Herc.* 1471 recovers an unidentified book from this work that was dedicated to freedom of expression. This is the *scriptio*:<sup>19</sup> (Φιλοδήμο[υ] | Τῶν κατ' ἐπιτομὴν ἐξείργασμένων Περὶ ἠθῶν καὶ βίων Ἐκ τῶν Ζήνων[ος σχολ]ῶν | [.] ὅ ἐστι Περὶ παρρησίας. In the book Philodemus presents the concept of freedom of expression as practiced by the Epicurean School; the *παρρησία* constituted a moment of communal search in which the master and pupil, through reciprocal benevolence and friendship, work every day towards achieving wisdom. In synthesizing and popularizing the lectures of the person who showed him the way to wisdom in the Kepos of Athens, Philodemus puts into actual practice the ideal of supportive and affable collaboration as conceived by the Founder. We do not know where and when the Gadaran reworked and synthesized Zeno's lectures. Nonetheless, if we consider the presence, among the rolls of the Villa in Herculaneum, of a *volumen* containing one of Zeno's works (*P.Herc.* 1533: Ζήνωνος Πρὸς τὸ Κρατέρου Πρὸς τὸ Περὶ τῶν γεωμετρικῶν ἀποδείξεων, Zeno, *Against Craterus's Refutation of "Demonstrations of Geometry"*), in which the Sidonian responded to attacks from the Euclidian Craterus against his essay "Demonstrations of Geometry,"<sup>20</sup> it is sensible to assume that the Gadaran carried with him when leaving Athens, along with the writings of Epicurus and the school's other founders, the works of his master, including the texts of his lectures—materials that he very likely reworked after his arrival in Italy.

When and why does Philodemus move from Athens to Rome? It is difficult to answer these two questions. We can safely assume that the living conditions in Athens did not meet his expectations. It has been thought<sup>21</sup> that the Gadaran decided to relocate to Italy around 75 BCE, ultimately because he was disappointed by the fact that, following the death of Zeno, whom he eagerly followed, Phaedrus was favored as successor to the head

of the school. Born around 138 BCE, Phaedrus was from a noble Athenian family and named scholarch at a late age (Cic. *ND* 1.33.93),<sup>22</sup> likely around 75.<sup>23</sup> Although this historical circumstance is not in itself improbable, we have no confirmation of it.<sup>24</sup> Probably the death of his beloved master had deprived Philodemus of an important existential frame of reference and this, perhaps along with the need for better economic opportunities, led him to relocate to Italy.

If, as appears likely, the Gadaran brought with him Zeno's works and the notes from his lectures, as well as the writings of the founding masters of the Kepos, it is clear that in coming to Rome he intended to spread the Epicurean philosophy in Italy. The scope of such philosophical undertaking has been debated. According to Sedley, we do not have proof that Philodemus's treatises had been published.<sup>25</sup> They may have only had a didactic purpose, and this fact would explain why none of them is mentioned in later sources, with the exception of his works in philosophical historiography. After having been challenged by Tepedino,<sup>26</sup> and with good reason, Sedley's thesis has been recuperated by Dorandi.<sup>27</sup> According to him, once in Italy, the Gadaran dedicated his entire philosophical activity to the diffusion of Zeno's thought among the Roman public, perhaps in opposition to that of Phaedrus. For Dorandi, it was nevertheless a diffusion limited only to the public that was able to frequent Piso's Villa in Herculaneum and there to converse with Philodemus and read his rolls, which, as Sedley believed, had never been published "in the modern sense of the word."<sup>28</sup> As a result, the adaptation of the Epicurean doctrines to the exigencies and politico-cultural reality of Rome—which is present in the writings of Philodemus, according to some scholars, among them Erler<sup>29</sup>—is for Dorandi to be attributed not to the Gadaran, but rather to Zeno, who was just a "spokesperson" and not at all concerned with being an original thinker.

We can raise the following objections to such a reductive view of Philodemus's philosophical dedication:

1. It is beyond doubt that the Gadaran is, at least to a certain extent, an original philosophical writer. On this topic, refer to the work of Tepedino<sup>30</sup> in disagreement with Sedley, but above all to the following volumes by Gigante: *Ricerche filodemee* (Naples, 1983),

*Filodemo in Italia* (Florence, 1990), *Altre ricerche filodemee* (Naples, 1998), and *Filodemo nella storia della letteratura greca* (Naples, 1998). In the last work, Gigante contends, among other things, that in the history of Epicureanism<sup>31</sup> and more broadly in the history of Greek literature, Philodemus plays a role that has an “efficacy neither passive nor inert.” Gigante shows how what we know about both Zeno and Philodemus is not trivial, as assumed by Dorandi. It above all allows us to distinguish between what belongs to one or the other. It allows us to identify in a decisive fashion the method of the master, and the forms and modes in which Philodemus, while faithful to the content, inherits and puts into practice such a method in order to articulate his deep historical and historiographical knowledge within the context of the Roman world.

2. I am sceptical of the possibility that Philodemus only addressed a small circle of learned men associated with the Villa (five, ten in total?), and that the papyri of Herculaneum never left the Villa itself. This is, after all, the underlying assumption of the thesis put forward by Dorandi. It is also the assumption of Sedley, who on the other hand holds<sup>32</sup> that the Herculaneum copies of Epicurus’s *Περὶ φύσεως* demonstrate irrefutably that the treatise was in circulation in Italy, and that Lucretius could have procured the text by having a copy produced from the very version among the papyri of the Villa. In my view, the fact that such books were read in the Villa does not preclude their being read outside of it. Cicero, just to name one example, recognized Philodemus’s profound knowledge, not just in philosophy. It is hard to believe that such recognition was not motivated by his reading the writings of the Gadaran, and I do not believe Cicero visited the Villa in Herculaneum! It should also be noted that from a paleographic-bibliological point of view the rolls of Philodemus appear to have been produced by a team of reasonably qualified scribes and correctors.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the presence of abbreviations and other critical markings in the books of Philodemus is known to be quite rare. These two facts are in my opinion difficult to reconcile with this vision of a private library, reserved and limited to the study and didactics of a master.



It is probable that Philodemus did not want to spread the Epicurean philosophy in Rome in a systematic and, I would say, disruptive manner, as Lucretius tried to do. He wanted, rather, to popularize and deepen, with substantial methodological and doctrinal loyalty to the master Zeno, those aspects he believed to be more consonant with the audience he wanted to reach. Such an audience of course needed to possess a vast education and the ability not simply to read and understand the Greek language, but to follow complex reasoning in Greek on topics like epistemology, theology, and geometry, as well as to appreciate the great erudition underlying the writings of Philodemus. Among these people there must have been more than just the few friends of the Gadaran who frequented the Villa, as well as a potentially more numerous contingent of the Roman aristocracy. It was Philodemus who moved to and lived in Italy long enough to understand in a deep way the public and private vices and virtues of the Roman aristocratic circles. He adapted the doctrine of Epicurus for such people.<sup>34</sup> Zeno could not have had a similarly deep understanding of the Italian reality.

It is undeniable that Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus was the most important point of reference in Italy for Philodemus, as shown unequivocally by the following records:

1. The Gadaran dedicates to him his *De bono rege secundum Homerum*, in which he portrays the ideal figure of the *optimus princeps*; and we can indeed read in the closing passages of this work (Dorandi col. 43.15–20): *εἰ δέ τινας παραλελοίπαμεν τῶν ἀφ[ορμῶν], ὧ Πείσων, ἃς ἔστι παρ' Ὀμήρου, λαβεῖν εἰς ἐπανόρθωσιν δυνάσταιων, καὶ τ[ῶν] πα[ρα]δ[ε]ιγμάτων* [...“If, Piso, we have left aside some arguments that we can draw from Homer to improve the princes, and some examples...”.<sup>35</sup> According to Sudhaus, it was Piso himself who had commissioned the treatise to Philodemus.<sup>36</sup> It is more likely that it was the Epicurean who dedicated it to him, and with the intention of defending him from Cicero’s accusations.<sup>37</sup> To Gigante, “the connection between Piso and Philodemus... is deeper and more meaningful when we link the series of portraits of Hellenistic princes found in the Herculaneum Villa with the subject of Philodemus’s pamphlet, which is the indication of ἀγαθὸς

δυνάστης, analogous to that of ἀγαθὸς ποιητής pursued in the *Poetica*.”<sup>38</sup>

2. In one of these epigrams (AP IX 44),<sup>39</sup> Philodemus invites Piso to his humble shack (εἰς λιτὴν καλιάδα) for a frugal lunch to be consumed on the occasion of the annual birthday celebration held by Epicureans in honor of the founder.<sup>40</sup>
3. In his oration *In Pisonem*, written in August of 55 BCE, Cicero offers a testimony of the close relationship between Philodemus and the politician: *est quidem Graecus, qui cum isto vivit . . . ; dedit se in consuetudinem sic, ut prorsus una viveret, nec fere umquam ab eo discederet* (*In Pis.* 68).

Thus, the Gadaran, a Greek poet and philosopher, once in Italy developed a close familiarity and friendship with Piso, who was his *patronus*.<sup>41</sup> Those who believe that Piso was simply one among many of Philodemus’s *patroni* are unconvincing.<sup>42</sup> Among these are Allen and De Lacy, who believe the dedication in the *De bono rege* and the invitation to lunch were mere attempts—and not necessarily successful ones—by the Gadaran to get protection and friendship from the politician, analogous to Lucretius’s try with Memmius, to whom *De rerum natura* is dedicated. Furthermore, according to Allen and De Lacy, proof that the relationship between Philodemus and Piso was not exclusive can be shown by two facts. First, the philosopher dedicates his work *On Rhetoric* to a young Gaius.<sup>43</sup> This person is believed to be Gaius Memmius, whose “early connection with Epicureanism is well established.”<sup>44</sup> Second, there was a close connection between the Gadaran and the Epicurean School of Naples, headed by Siro and comprised of poverty-stricken people who lived and studied together, among whom there could not have been rich individuals like Piso or Memmius.

In my opinion, even if we only had at our disposal Cicero’s testimony, this by itself would be enough to prove the strong tie between the Gadaran and Piso.<sup>45</sup> As to the beneficiary of the dedication in *On Rhetoric* (or at least in the fourth book of the work, which contains the passage where the author refers to him), Dorandi demonstrates, albeit not flawlessly, that it is Caesar’s lieutenant Gaius Vibius Pansa Caetronianus, who was consul in 43

BCE, and who was sympathetic to Epicureanism and interested in rhetoric.<sup>46</sup> Such dedication confirms what was stated above, namely that the Gadaran was not addressing only the small circle of people frequenting the Herculaneum Villa. Moreover, I cannot see how Philodemus's connection with the Epicurean circle of Siro could weaken the bond with Piso. The friendship with Siro was the result of a professional and ideological tie, quite different from that with Piso, which was evidently based on the more tangible need for security, and so a relationship built on trust and devotion.

Where did Philodemus live in Italy? An initial answer to this question comes from the previously mentioned epigram *AP IX 44*, in which the Gadaran invites Piso to a frugal lunch for the Epicurean commemorative day, *εἰς λιτὴν καλιάδα*, in his "humble shack." According to Gigante, the epigram:

...is an invitation to the *patronus*, transpiring of a sentiment of friendship rather than servitude, a *Stimmung* based on trust and devotion. The underlying situation presented in the epigram implies that the small home offered by the poet-philosopher as a meeting point is in Rome and not on the shores of Campania: as Philippon believed, it could have [been] a gift by Piso. . . . the tone of the invitation shows how, in spite of the difference in social milieu, the relationship is not of subordination, but friendship. . . . the patron has become a trusted friend, who in turn has deeper confidence with the spiritual world of Epicurus and Philodemus.<sup>47</sup>

It is likely that the humble home of the Gadaran is to be located in Rome, and that it had been donated by Piso is a mere suggestion (perhaps an unnecessary one) by Philippon.<sup>48</sup>

In a passage from the oration *In Pisonem* 70, Cicero writes that Philodemus was *Graecus facilis et valde venustus, nimis pugnax contra imperatorem populi Romani esse noluit*. According to Cichorius, who was among the first researchers to look for autobiographical data in Philodemus's poetry, Cicero's quote indicates both that the Gadaran was already living in Piso's home during the years in which he ruled that province, and that they had met there, since Piso was *imperator* only during the years he was governor of Macedonia (58–55), and since he could no longer pride himself on this title upon returning to Rome.<sup>49</sup> Later, in 55, Philodemus followed Piso to Italy and lived with him in his home. I think that what can be inferred from Cicero's passage is too weak to establish whether or not Philodemus came to Italy following Piso. In my view,

Cicero simply wants to stress that during Piso's time as governor of Macedonia the Gadaran was never overly hostile to his *patronus*, a fact that does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the two lived in the same house during that time.

If, as everything suggests, the Greek library in the Herculaneum Villa of the Papyri was assembled by Philodemus—in the sense that he added the more substantial group of his treatises to the original core of manuscripts from the school's founders, collected by him in Athens and carried to Italy<sup>50</sup>—then it is certain that he frequented the lavish residence, which was built practically on the beach of Herculaneum and (as we will see later on) very likely belonged to Piso himself. In such a home Philodemus might have encountered the group of Augustan intellectuals represented by Lucius Varius Rufus, Quintilius Varus, Plotius Tucca, and Vergil, whom he is addressing in certain books of the work *On Vices and Their Opposing Virtues*, sharing reflections on ethical topics developed in the important treatise.<sup>51</sup>

Gigante has identified two pieces of evidence for the regular presence of Philodemus at the Villa in Herculaneum.<sup>52</sup> The first one is *AP IX 421*:<sup>53</sup>

Already the rose has arrived, the chickpea in its full bloom, the cabbage stalk needing to quickly be cut, Sosylos, the springing sardines, the salty cheese beginning to set, and the foamy leaves of the curly lettuce; we are not ascending the promontory nor are we on the prospect as ever in the past, Sosylos. Indeed, just yesterday, Antigenes and Bakchios were playing; but today, we are now carrying them out to be buried.<sup>54</sup>

Gigante argues that:

The epigram belongs to the short series of those written in Italy and fits naturally in the context of Epicurean philosophy: everything is ephemeral except omnipresent death, which undermines life, suddenly takes away your friends, and breaks the habit of even an everyday life made of plain food and relaxing amusements after the effort of philosophical research and strict study.<sup>55</sup>

According to him, ἀκτὴν was not, “as commonly intended, the beach, but the promontory,” which is to say “the tall edge of the villa” of the Piso family, whereas ἀποψις should be the belvedere (vista point) of the building, accessible via a four-step staircase.<sup>56</sup> For Gigante, the belvedere was for “joint entertainment along with modest dining, in contemplation of

nature and in playing social games, particularly during the spring.” In his view:

The reference to ἄποψις at the belvedere of the Villa helps us in a decisive way to rid the epigrams of other mistaken references and other mistaken interpretations.<sup>57</sup>

Sider translates line 5: “But we neither go on the shore nor are we on the promontory, Sosylos, as we always used to.”<sup>58</sup> He considers the identification put forward by Gigante “inviting,” yet stresses that Herculaneum was built on a promontory, hence:

May be referring in ἄκτῆς to that part of Herculaneum that juts out most prominently, and in ἐν ἀπόψει to the view of the sea from that point.<sup>59</sup>

According to Longo, the findings of the recently resumed excavation of the Herculaneum Villa instead “seem to confirm” the interpretation offered by Gigante.<sup>60</sup> Angeli<sup>61</sup> also thinks that apopsis is the belvedere of the Villa. In my view, and as Gigante believed, the epigram harmonizes perfectly with the Epicurean ideology. The bond of friendship, the communal frugal lunch, the enjoyment of the beauty of nature, the awareness of the ineluctible unexpectedness of death and the extreme fragility of man in the face of it, and the grief for the loss of people dear to us are all typical motifs of the Philosophy of the Garden. Nonetheless, I do not believe it is crucial for the interpretation of the poem to identify the Herculaneum Villa as the meeting place for Philodemus and his companions. Of course Sosylos, whom the Gadaran is addressing, knew well the place referenced by the poet.<sup>62</sup> But nevertheless, if he wanted to mention the house of his *patronus*, he would have been less vague. Ἀκτὴ carries three major meanings: “high shore, promontory” (e.g., *Od.* 5.405); “peninsula” (e.g., *Arist. Pol.* 1329b 11); and “prominence” (e.g., *Aesch. Ch.* 722: of a tomb). Today we know that the Villa of the Papyri was built on the beach and expanded to at least five floors, the uppermost being the finest one on which the owner lived and where the *exedra*-belvedere was located.<sup>63</sup> The main entrance of the building was located at the height of this floor, which was not any higher than the entrances to most of the exclusive villas situated within the city. We can therefore ask whether it makes sense to use the expression “climb to the promontory” to indicate heading to the Villa in Herculaneum, as its

elevation was not significantly higher than that part of the city. In my view, the ἀκτὴ of which Philodemus generally speaks was probably a section of the Campania coast that offered a good view.<sup>64</sup>

The second epigram is AP XI 35, in which Philodemus invites his friends to a modest communal lunch:

Artemidoros has given us cabbage, Aristarchos baccala, Athenagoras spring onions, Philodemos a small liver, and Apollophanes two pounds of pork (three are left from yesterday). Slave, get us Chian wine, wreaths, sandals, and myrrh: I want to have them in at 4 PM sharp.<sup>65</sup>

According to Gigante, the epigram “integrates the other one, leading us to the belvedere of the Villa” and revealing “the testimonial value of the simple life of the Epicurean community at the Villa in Herculaneum.”<sup>66</sup> The scholar refutes the hypothesis of Cichorius, who believed the epigram should be situated in the context of the Roman Epicurean circle of Philodemus.<sup>67</sup> For Cichorius, Artemidoros should be the rhetorician from Knidos (son of Theopompus) and friend of Julius Caesar (son-in-law of Piso Caesoninus), who on the fateful Ides of March had foretold the betrayal of Caesar as he approached the Curia;<sup>68</sup> Apollophanes, moreover, should be the freedman of Sextus Pompeius and expert admiral who switched to Octavianus’s side in 38 and very likely lived in Rome thereafter. Gigante deems it:

... hard to think of the four dinner guests as figures of high social rank. The feast is simple and organized in accordance with the custom, and Philodemus adapts to his reality models in the epigrammatic tradition of the symposium ἔρᾱνος, of συμβολαί.<sup>69</sup>

For Sider, Cichorius’s suggestion about Artemidoros is “most attractive”; with respect to Apollophanes, however, he does not believe he was the admiral of Sextus Pompeius, as it is difficult to regard 38 as *terminus post quem* for the epigram’s composition. Concerning the objection by Gigante, Sider observes that “if Piso could be invited to share in a simple Epicurean fare, could any Greek be too socially elevated to be invited?”<sup>70</sup>

I find this last observation weak. In the case of the *Invitation to Piso*, the *patronus* is only called upon to participate in the frugal meal honoring Epicurus; he is not asked to bring anything to help prepare the table. In AP XI 35, however, each one of the guests—whom we can recognize as the

*graeculi* mocked by Cicero<sup>71</sup>—offered something for the lunch. If they were figures of higher rank, would Philodemus have asked them just the same for a modest contribution? I believe the guests are destined to remain in the shadows. We can only say, as with Sosylos, Antigenes, and Bakchios of *AP* IX 421, that they are part of Philodemus’s circle. But, as Gigante maintains, we do not possess sufficient evidence to affirm that the epigram takes place within the Villa in Herculaneum.

In my opinion, attempting to extract autobiographical data from the poetry of Philodemus is legitimate, as long as it is done, on one hand, without succumbing to feeble hypotheses and, on the other, without falling into the temptation of a “panepicurean” or “panherculaneum” vision of his verses.<sup>72</sup> The Gadaran *dossier* of poems was certainly enriched in 1987 after the publication of *P.Oxy.* 3724 (dated around the end of the first century CE), which contained a long list of roughly 175 incipits of Greek epigrams, of which at least twenty-seven match the epigrams by Philodemus we know from the *Palatine Anthology*. This makes it probable that other epigrams in the papyrus were composed by the Gadaran.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, it is also quite probable that in Campania the Gadaran associated with the Epicurean Siro, master of Vergil and leading figure of the Epicurean circle in Naples.<sup>74</sup>

We do not know when and where Philodemus died. In a passage from his *De signis* (De Lacy col. 2.18) he mentions “the pygmies that Antonius had recently brought from Syria”; since this episode dates back to 40 BCE, we can assume that the philosopher was still alive then. It is therefore likely that he died sometime between 40 and 35 BCE.<sup>75</sup> It is equally likely that he died in Rome or Campania.

## THE VILLA OF THE PAPYRI AT HERCULANEUM

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### When and Why It Was Built



It is likely that the greater part of Philodemus's life and work in Italy took place in Herculaneum, where he frequented the luxurious building that was very probably owned by his *patronus*, Piso Caesoninus, and located just north-west of the city. It was built on the shore and for reasons of climate expertly placed with the corners, not the sides, aligned with the cardinal directions. The Villa was divided into five floors in total. It was one of those typical villas erected by wealthy Roman aristocrats sometime between the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire. They were located in pleasant places all over the gulf of Naples, such as Baiae, Puteoli, Herculaneum, Stabiae, and Surrentum, so that the aristocrats could spend their leisure time enjoying gentle climes and panoramas of the sea. The Villa, extending 253 m in length and approximately 100 m in width, for a total of at least 20,000 m<sup>2</sup>,<sup>76</sup> had five major sections: (1) the atrium quarter (to the south), where one of the entrances was located; (2) the square or minor peristyle (at the center); (3) the living quarter with the library and bathroom (to the north-east); (4) the rectangular or large peristyle (to the west); (5) the garden with some rooms and, to the far west, the *exedra*-belvedere. With our present information it is not possible to set precisely the date at which the Villa was constructed. It was commonly assumed that it had been built over two periods of construction: the central frame of the *domus*, that is to say the atrium and the square peristyle, along with adjacent areas, dated back to the first half of the first century BCE, whereas the rectangular peristyle had been added towards the end of the same century.<sup>77</sup> The recent excavations, carried out particularly in the atrium area and the first lower level during the years 1996–98 and 2007–2008, allow us to estimate with greater accuracy the time and mode of construction. According to De Simone and Ruffo, the wall decoration and mural technique in the atrium area lead us to believe that the building could date back to the period 60–40 BCE, but more likely 60 BCE.<sup>78</sup> But according to Guidobaldi and Esposito, we should abandon the thesis that the building was constructed in two distinct periods. In fact, in their view:

The open air excavation of the atrium quarter has demonstrated that this constitutes an organic architectonic complex, surely the result of a single project, that received few and insubstantial modifications.<sup>79</sup>

They believe the construction technique for both the atrium floor and the wall decorations suggests that the Villa was erected between 40 and 30 BCE. If confirmed by future excavations, such dating could potentially have very important consequences. The Villa might have been built when both the leading characters connected to it, i.e. Piso Caesoninus and Philodemus, were either very old or already deceased.<sup>80</sup>

## Who Built It, Who Lived in It, and How It Was Furnished

The identification of the Villa owner has always been one of the problems concerning the Herculaneum papyri. Over the course of the last two centuries, a total of eight proposals for the Villa attribution have been put forward: (1) Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus; (2) Marcus Octavius; (3) Lucius Calpurnius Piso Pontifex; (4) Appius Claudius Pulcher; (5) Mammii; (6) Balbi; (7) Lucius Marcius Philippus; (8) C. Memmius.

The credit for having organically and scientifically developed hypothesis (1) (Piso Caesoninus) goes to Domenico Comparetti, who after an initial formulation in 1879<sup>81</sup> presented it extensively in the renowned volume *La Villa Ercolanese dei Pisoni. I suoi monumenti e la sua biblioteca*.<sup>82</sup> The volume was written in collaboration with the archeologist G. De Petra and appeared in Turin in 1883. It is significant that the first attempt at attributing the Villa was based substantially on the presence of Greek books in the building. These are the main elements on which Comparetti established his proposal:

1. The massive number of works in the Greek library of the Villa (the library consisting of Epicurean texts) by Philodemus, a rather unknown author in ancient times. This suggests that it was he himself who assembled the library. It is no coincidence that among the writings of this philosopher there are texts that figure as preparatory works for subsequent ones.
2. Philodemus, who was penniless and in need of protection by a *patronus*, could not have owned the Villa; it had to belong to a rich

and noble man, Philodemus's contemporary and friend, who in that residence hosted him, or at least his books.

3. Piso Caesoninus (101–after 43 BCE), who was close to Philodemus according to Cicero and others, might very well have been the owner of the sumptuous home.
4. According to Cicero, the beautiful marble and bronze sculptures adorning the building were the result of Piso's appropriations in Byzantium and many other Greek cities during his proconsulate in Macedonia.<sup>83</sup> According to Comparetti, after Caesoninus's death in 43 BCE, the Villa passed to his son, Lucius Calpurnius Piso Pontifex, consul in 15 BCE and proconsul in Syria and Pamphylia in 13 BCE.

The strongest points in Comparetti's argument are in identifying both the importance of the relation between Caesoninus and Philodemus, and the relevance of the presence of drafts among the Gadaran's writings. The Piso hypothesis—reaffirmed by Comparetti some thirty years later when, following advancements in the study of the Herculaneum Papyri, he attempted to establish a brief chronology of the Villa library<sup>84</sup>—was immediately opposed, especially in Germany. The position held by T. Mommsen is well known. He underlined the complete lack of archeological evidence for the presence of the *gens Calpurnia* in Herculaneum.<sup>85</sup> Hermann Diels did not believe in the Piso hypothesis either.<sup>86</sup> We owe him hypothesis (2) (Marcus Octavius). He proposed it in 1882, on the basis of the name *Μάρκου Ὀκταυίου* placed, like an *ex libris*, under the second to last column of both *P.Herc.* 993/1149 (Epicurus, *On Nature* II) and *P.Herc.* 336/1150 (Polystratus, *Irrational Contempt of Common Opinions of the People*). Diels maintained that this Marcus Octavius was either the owner of these two rolls that ended up in Philodemus's library, or the owner of the Villa. According to Diels, the fact that the name on each of the two rolls was from a hand different than the one that had penned the text prevents us from thinking the name was written by a scribe. In his view, assigning ownership of the building to Octavius was basically no less risky than attributing it to Piso or Poseidonax, son of Biton, whose name was in the bottom margin at the end of *P.Herc.* 1426 (Philodemus *On Rhetoric* III), and could have been either the scribe of the roll or the owner of the

*volumen*.<sup>87</sup> Diels's hypothesis has, after some ups and downs, been proposed again on several occasions since 1959 by B. Hemmerdinger. According to Hemmerdinger, the Marcus Octavius mentioned in the two Herculaneum *ex libris*, and who was the owner of the Villa, should be identified with the homonymous politician who was *aedile curule* in 50 BCE. From time to time correct objections to Hemmerdinger's arguments have been raised. For my part, I will only mention the extreme fragility of the equation on which they are based: Marcus Octavius owner of only two rolls = Marcus Octavius owner of the entire library = Marcus Octavius owner of the entire Villa. In my opinion, the more prudent hypothesis is to consider Marcus Octavius a reader or, more likely, the previous owner of the two rolls, which likely ended up in the library of the Villa at the end of the first century BCE.

Comparetti's hypothesis found better footing in the English-speaking context. It was reaffirmed on several occasions by H. Bloch, among others. In 1940, on the basis of an inscription found in Samothrace dating back to 56–55 BCE and dedicated to Piso Caesoninus, Bloch was able to confirm the pro-Hellenism of the politician and to support the possibility of attributing the Villa to him.<sup>88</sup> Subsequently, in 1961, Nisbet asked whether the library of the Villa was actually Philodemus's.<sup>89</sup> In so doing Nisbet downplayed the significance of the preponderance of writings by the Gadaran, as he believed that the most illustrious Epicurean philosopher of the time "had to be well represented in any Epicurean library." Bloch responded that the library in Herculaneum could not be considered "just any Epicurean library."<sup>90</sup> If over the course of more than a hundred years, from Philodemus's death to the eruption of 79 CE, the Villa did not receive any new accessions, this meant that there was a wish to respect the integrity of the collection of books and papers of Philodemus. And that can only be explained if the Villa remained with the same Piso family until the end. These two contributions by Bloch have somewhat strengthened Comparetti's hypothesis, even if we have no proof that the Greek library of the Villa did not receive accessions after the death of Philodemus, a death that, as was said, we can conventionally assume to have occurred no later than 40–35 BCE. On the contrary, according to Cavallo, there were acquisitions of Epicurean works (including some by the Gadaran as well) at

the Villa between the end of the first century BCE and the early years of the first century CE.<sup>91</sup>

In 1971 Pandermalis brought to the debate a new consideration that thereafter could not be left aside: the meaning and inspiration of the complex and organic sculptural decorations of the building, and their relation to the library conserved within it.<sup>92</sup> The possibility that the rich display of sculptures was organized by a single person with a precise project had already been introduced in 1923 by G. Lippold.<sup>93</sup> Pandermalis, however, was the first to attempt to identify the owner of the house by clearly reconstructing the program that inspired the sculptural decoration and connecting that program directly with the book heritage of the house. Having found a variety of correspondences between the Epicurean's writings and the ideology of his patron, Piso Caesoninus, Pandermalis believed he could conclude that the owner had organized the sculptural decorations according to an organic program inspired by Philodemus and focused on the juxtaposition of *res privata* and *res publica*, the contemplative life and the active life. On this view, Philodemus had intended to compare two notions of existence: on the one hand, that of the erudite philosopher and Epicurean poet who lives a secluded life, and on the other hand that of the politically active man, the orator and the warrior—the latter of which was, according to Pandermalis himself, a notion quite close to the Stoic philosophy of the time. An examination of the style of the various relics, along with consideration of some historical events, led Pandermalis to believe that the Villa's sculptural decoration dated back to the last decades of the first century BCE. This is a rather important conclusion, one perhaps not explored enough by others. If we indeed accept such dating and believe that the architectonical complex belonged to the *gens Calpurnia*, then we must rule out the possibility that Philodemus suggested the decorative selections of the house to Piso Caesoninus, who died around 40 BCE. It is no accident that Pandermalis finds it more likely that the owner was the son, L. Calpurnius Piso Pontifex (48 BCE–32 CE), a friend and patron of the epigram composer Antipater of Thessalonica and lauded by Velleius Paterculus (2.98.3) for his rare ability to reconcile the love for idleness (*otium*) with an active commitment towards fulfilling his duties (*negotium*).<sup>94</sup>

The hypothesis of Pandermalis received important support in 1990 from Adamo Muscettola.<sup>95</sup> According to her, the bust originating from Herculaneum and very likely depicting Pontifex was originally located in the Villa *tablinum*, along with portraits of other members of the owner's family. If the scholar is right, the bust represents the unequivocal archeological testimony of the connection of the Villa on the one hand with Herculaneum, broadly speaking, and on the other hand, with the Piso family, a condition required by Mommsen, as discussed, in order to attribute the building to this family. For my part I would like to point out that, if Philodemus had conceived of the project for the galleries of statues and busts and suggested it to Pontifex, this could not have occurred before 28 BCE, when the Roman noble was twenty years old. Philodemus, however, could have been ninety years old then, or already dead. Above all, I would like to ask: can we make, as Pandermalis is inclined, all of the Villa's sculptures fall under a single figurative program, from the larger sculptures to the smaller ones, from the finer ones to the less-refined ones? Let me provide just one example: the imposing statue of Athena Panathenaic and Promachos, situated between two columns connecting the *tablinum*, an area realistically dedicated to reading the books of the house, with the squared peristyle.<sup>96</sup> Could it really have symbolized, as Pandermalis thinks, the ancient antagonism between wisdom and power? Is it not odd to suppose that a disciple of Epicureanism, one who certainly did not love war even if he tried hard to adjust to the Roman mentality, might have suggested placing in such a crucial position—i.e. in alignment with both *tablinum* openings and therefore also quite visible from the back of the rectangular peristyle—a statue that, according to Pandermalis himself, had been appreciated by reviled Stoic rivals?<sup>97</sup>

In 1980 the reconstruction by Pandermalis was refuted by G. Sauron in an article that can be regarded as the most extreme speculation by which critics attempt an all-encompassing interpretation of the Villa.<sup>98</sup> Sauron begins from the fact, which he finds incontrovertible, that the owner was an adherent of Epicurean philosophy. But Sauron never deals with the problem of the owner's identity. On his view, this antithetical principle, which Pandermalis sees as the basis for the sculptural decoration, is the result of a flawed methodological analysis, since it "blends the systematic usage of details, in most cases, outside of their context, with an aprioristic concept of



the intentions of the client.”<sup>99</sup> For Sauron, the Villa floorplan is fundamental because it shows how the building largely replicated a Hellenistic gymnasium according to the precise choice of the owner. The owner’s intention with such a structure was to represent the garden of Epicurus, following a trend that became popular towards the second half of the first century BCE, a trend in which gymnasiums dedicated to Athena would mimic the philosophical schools of Athens, which were mostly located in gymnasiums. For Sauron, the owner identified his garden of Epicurus with the Garden of the Blessed, and so he filled it with images of the Greek political and cultural heroes of Epicurus’s time. The reconstruction by Sauron is intriguing. What makes it methodologically weak is its starting point: namely, taking the building floorplan as evidence of the owner’s intentions. Relying on the floorplan of a house to date or interpret it is risky method. It does not seem impossible that the owner wanted to imitate a Greek gymnasium in some way, but that he wanted to identify it with Epicurus is certainly excessive.

In 1980 an essay by Wojcik took up again the problem of the commission of the sculptural decoration, as well as the connected one concerning the identification of the owner.<sup>100</sup> The essay anticipated a larger study, published in 1986, on the materials recovered in the Villa.<sup>101</sup> With Wojcik archeology takes over the field of research completely and eliminates papyrology almost entirely. For her, the dichotomy between philological analysis and archeological investigation has, in the attempt to find a solution to both problems, given a dominant role to the content of the Philodemian and Epicurean papyri of the Villa. The recovered rolls, however, are probably only remnants of the building’s library. For Wojcik, the Herculaneum art gallery is inspired not by esthetic intentions or by a sympathy for Epicureanism, but rather by a set of eclectic cultural tensions. These tensions were quite common among Roman *nobiles* in the late Republic, which had already largely moved on from the contrast between *otium* and *negotium*, typical of the preceding period, to a synthetic effort aimed at recovering *otium* as a value, as a thought, that distinguishes man from beast, and hence constitutes “a necessary and useful activity for public life.”<sup>102</sup> As a consequence, the Epicurean presence in the Villa needs to be significantly reduced. This point, along with Mommsen’s objection, leads to the refutation not only of Comparetti’s hypothesis, which attributes the



house to Caesoninus, but also the hypothesis of Pandermalis, who thinks it belongs to Pontifex. According to Wojcik, the owner was Appius Claudius Pulcher, consul in 54 BCE and uncle of the homonymous patron of Herculaneum, who in turn was consul in 38 BCE. The philhellenism of Pulcher was deeper than that of Piso and his ties with Asia Minor were stronger. He was a man of letters and an orator who participated in the political life of the late Republic. Wojcik accepts the possibility that at the time of catastrophe the Villa was being cleared out, or at least undergoing some kind of transformation. This was in her view attested by the presence of papyri in boxes around the two peristyles and some grain in one of the noblemen's quarters, as well as by the altering of the *tablinum* decoration.<sup>103</sup> As Gallavotti first realized, the *tablinum* was intended as a monumental entrance to the library, which was located in adjacent quarters and later also used for displaying portraits of some members of the new owner's family—someone different from the Appius Claudius Pulcher who had commissioned the entire sculptural decoration.<sup>104</sup> According to Wojcik, the new building owner might have been among the *Mammii* family that emerged in the Julio-Claudian period and replaced the *Claudii Pulchri* as Herculaneum's patrons. That family included both L. Annius Mammianus Rufus, *duovir quinquennalis*, who lived at the time of Augustus and built the Herculaneum theater, and the wealthy freedman L. Mammius Maximus, the Augustan priest of the Claudian period to whom the people of Herculaneum dedicated a bronze statue on the *summa cavea* of the theater itself.

Wojcik's attempt to remove the link between the Villa and the Piso family found some support in 1984 from Costabile.<sup>105</sup> He identified in Latin *P.Herc.* 1067 and 1475 a political and judicial oration, respectively. From this Costabile affirmed that the Greek section of the library, which likely belonged to Philodemus, must have been incorporated into the more general book collection of the house, which was comprised of various sections, one of which might have included *P.Herc.* 817 (*Carmen de Bello Actiaco*) and the two orations. For Costabile, the three texts align well with the Republican ideology that, according to Wojcik, is the basis for the sculptural decoration of the Villa. He holds that the owner of the Villa might even have been an Epicurean or an eclectic character with Epicurean sympathies, but the owner was in any case a representative of the senatorial ideology and tradition. Beside the figure of Appius Claudius Pulcher,

Costabile believes we can nominate Lucius Marcius Philippus, who was consul in 91 BCE and whose philhellenism is attested many times by Cicero.<sup>106</sup>

In 1987 Scatozza and Longo subjected Wojcik's research to a strict examination, and with good reason.<sup>107</sup> Scatozza noticed, among other things, that we cannot always be certain of Wojcik's interpretations of individual pieces of the sculpture gallery, since those interpretations are often based on the building context alone, because of the lack of replicas of the images. Scatozza does not rule out attributing the building to the Piso family. But given the possibility that the portraits, despite the common belief that they had been found in the *tablinum*, most probably came from a different part of Herculaneum, she deems it possible to attribute ownership to the *Balbi* family, the family to which the proconsul and patron of Herculaneum, Marcus Nonius Balbus, belonged.<sup>108</sup> Longo, for her part, observed that the roughly 1,000 papyri that have been discovered probably did not constitute the "remnants" of the original library, as Wojcik wrongly believed, but rather a real specialist library. This was probably Philodemus's personal library and contained, as demonstrated by Cavallo, rough drafts and provisional editions of books of the works *Ordering of the Philosophers* and *On Rhetoric*.<sup>109</sup> Longo finds Wojcik's attempt to loosen the bond between Philodemus and Piso Caesoninus to be weak, and rightly so.

In 1987 Gigante intervened in the debate over the ownership of the building and the interpretation of the decoration plan.<sup>110</sup> According to Gigante, Wojcik's giving up the influence of Epicurean doctrine and multiplying the possible interpretations of the decoration yielded a weak hypothesis. On his view, it seems most probable that Piso Caesoninus was the owner of the building and the commissioner of the decoration that may have been further developed by Philodemus to a significant extent. The works of the Gadaran present by and large all the Hellenistic science and culture that we find reproduced in the Villa. The Hellenistic rulers portrayed in the house—Ptolemy II Philadelphus, Demetrius of Phalerum, Archidamus III of Sparta, Philetaerus of Pergamon, Pyrrhus king of Epirus, Demetrius Poliorcetes, Seleucus I Nicator, and Antiochus IV Epiphanes—"are not simply those under whom the philosophical civilization surveyed by Philodemus developed, but a political model as well."<sup>111</sup> In fact, in his

*On the Good King According to Homer*, dedicated incidentally to Caesoninus, Philodemus discussed famous rulers as negative examples (e.g. Nicomedes III Euergetes, Cambyses, Demetrius Poliorcetes) in opposition to the Homeric heroes. According to Gigante, the statues of Aeschines, Isocrates, and Demosthenes can be explained by Philodemus's *On Rhetoric*. The images of Sappho, Panyassis, and Antimachus represent the poetry on which the Gadaran has written the most; those of Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Zeno of Citium refer, in turn, to his *Ordering of the Philosophers*; and the images of divinities like Athena, Hermes, and Pan reflect the theology of the Garden, where the gods are anthropomorphic.<sup>112</sup>

In 1994 Warden and Romano argued that the sculptural plan for the building addressed the need to offer the observer a set of contrasts: private/public, *otium/negotium*, internal/external, and order/disorder.<sup>113</sup> According to the two scholars, this message does not contradict the Epicurean philosophy of the Villa's owner.

In 2005 the debate on ownership was shaken, albeit indirectly, by a new discipline: archeometry. This was thanks to a rich volume by C. Mattusch that, like Wojcik's in 1986, had the merit of thoroughly examining and cataloging the over eighty sculptures recovered in the Villa (including statues, herms, and busts, in bronze and marble).<sup>114</sup> From the archeometric examinations of the marble and bronze materials, as well as from X-rays of many of those in bronze, Mattusch was able to establish the following points:

1. In the rectangular peristyle of the Villa, the vast majority of the sculptures were made from imported marble. The fact that the figures depicted were Greek and the materials precious undoubtedly increased the guests' admiration for the owners, who in turn encouraged their guests to reflect in a sophisticated way on famous Greek rulers, warriors, orators, writers, athletes, and divinities.
2. The small bronze busts of Epicurus (three pieces), Hermarchus (two pieces), Demosthenes (two pieces), and Zeno of Citium found in the *tablinum*, in the adjacent areas, and in the library-storage echo the Roman habit, attested by Pliny the Elder (*NH* 35.2.9), of adorning private libraries with portraits of famous literary figures.

They appear to originate from a local workshop “that produced bronze busts of famous literary figures of the Greek world.”<sup>115</sup> They might have been purchased directly by the Villa owners, “but it is easy to imagine that the guests stopped by the workshop, located on the way to the Villa, and purchased the busts as gifts to the hosts,” an occurrence that would also explain the presence of duplicates. Among these was a small bust, found in the *tablinum*, of a woman belonging to the Julio-Claudian family (likely Agrippina the Younger, 15–59 CE, the wife and perhaps murderer of the emperor Claudius). Whoever owned the house in the first century CE probably wanted, with this bust, to brag about his close ties to the imperial family. Acquisitions from the imperial period include three bronze busts found in the *tablinum* and depicting perhaps “three generations of the same family.”<sup>116</sup> Also acquired were two bronze busts presumably from the reign of Tiberius.<sup>117</sup>

3. Those who inhabited the Villa between the first century BCE and the first century CE collected, as a result of purchases and gifts, all sorts of marble and bronze sculptures, some of which were fine pieces, others mass produced.<sup>118</sup> The variety and duplication of the subjects prove that they had different tastes. Some sculptures show a rather complacent imitation of the imperial family’s tastes.
4. Neither in the rectangular peristyle nor in any other part of the Villa does there appear to have been a unifying decorative theme, as we are led to believe by the considerable variety of formats, styles, production types, and subjects of the pieces exhibited.
5. The tight bond between Philodemus and Piso Caesoninus remains crucial for attributing the Villa to the latter. The most gripping evidence that Piso owned the building is the merciless portrait of him by Cicero in the oration of 55 BCE. The case for Piso Pontifex is weaker. It is not possible, however, to know: first, which pieces were part of the sculpture collection at the time of Caesoninus; second, who eventually enriched the collection and when; and finally, if the building had changed ownership in the course of time. The fact that Philodemus’s writings were still in the Villa over a hundred years after the deaths of the Gadaran and Piso suggests, at

any rate, that it might have remained in the hands of the same family.

The most significant contribution by Mattusch is to have brought a diachronic and at the same time “dynamic” vision to the sculpture collection of the building, assembled in her view over the course of a long stretch of time, from the first century BCE to the first century CE, and originally produced in many workshops.

Rather agnostic is Dillon. According to her:

The unusual and particular character of the portraits from the Villa of the Papyri clearly demonstrates . . . a high level of interest and engagement on the part of the patron in the selection of subjects. That is, these are not the kinds of portraits one would have found readily available in a sculptor’s workshop, or the selection one would have received in response to a generic commission for Greek portraits for a garden. . . . The precise programmatic intentions of the patron (or patrons) who chose the portraits for this villa are, however, difficult to reconstruct without knowing the identity of all the portrait subjects.<sup>119</sup>

The most recent hypotheses on the building’s ownership show that there is still a good deal of perplexity among archeologists over the Piso hypothesis. M. Pagano, after having expressed on several occasions support for the attribution of ownership to Appius Claudius Pulcher,<sup>120</sup> has recently suggested the candidacy of C. Memmius,<sup>121</sup> who was praetor in 58 BCE, an orator and literary man, author of erotic poems, and the husband of Fausta, daughter of Sulla. He is known above all because Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* (1.25) is dedicated to him. Pagano builds upon both the attested presence of the *gens Memmia* in Herculaneum and the fact that during his exile in Athens (where he had been sent for electoral fraud) Memmius “renovated the home of Epicurus.” As Guidobaldi<sup>122</sup> pointed out in her refutation of this suggestion, Pagano in fact misread the episode about Epicurus’s home, of which we are informed by a letter sent by Cicero to Memmius either towards the end of June or in July of 51 BCE.<sup>123</sup> From this letter we learn that Memmius was planning to demolish the house of Epicurus located in the deme of Melite, which was owned by Memmius himself and hampering his real-estate development plans. Behind a heartfelt and pressing request by Patro, then head of the Epicurean School of Athens, but also by his friend Pomponius Atticus, Cicero asked the Roman politician to favor the abolition of a decree by the Areopagus permitting the

demolition of the illustrious residence. However, at the time Cicero was writing to him, Memmius had already abandoned his development plans, although he was still showing some resistance to fulfilling Patro's wish.

Guidobaldi contends that the attribution of ownership to Calpurnii Pisones is the most grounded. In her view, Pagano nevertheless deserves credit for drawing attention to the fate of the house of Epicurus, which might actually have had "some kind of relation" to the Villa. By the mid-first century BCE, in that decaying home in the deme of Melite, there was likely still present the library of Epicurus, as attested by Diogenes Laertius (10.17; 10.21), a library which the philosopher left as inheritance to his successor Hermarchus, along with the house. Therefore, if we accept that it was Philodemus himself who transported to Italy the books of the founder of the Garden and his disciples, the books which ended up constituting the fundamental core of the Villa's library, it is possible, according to Guidobaldi, that it was the Gadaran who took the books from Epicurus's house, then in ruins, and brought them to safety in Italy. The hypothesis by Guidobaldi is attractive, but it does not take into account the fact that Philodemus moved to Italy from Athens, where he attended the lectures of the then-Epicurean scholarch Zeno of Sidon, around 75 BCE. At that time the Garden was managed, as mentioned, by Phaedrus and was still well maintained. We do not possess any support for the idea that the Gadaran, even later on, towards the mid-first century BCE, came into possession of Epicurus's library.

Recently Angeli<sup>124</sup> has pointed out the problems connected with the dating of the construction of the Villa in the third quarter of the 1st century BCE; in her view this dating makes the presence of the philosopher in the Villa problematic but on the other hand it is impossible to exclude Piso Caesoninus and Philodemus and their relationship from the same building, based on archaeological and literary sources. According to her Piso was the owner of the Villa and Philodemus received protection and hospitality from him.

On the problem of the owner of the Herculaneum Villa we can establish the following points:

1. We do not have indisputable evidence for attributing the Villa to a specific family.

2. Such evidence can only be the result of a full excavation of the estate, which will give us clear indications of its phases of construction and living arrangements.
3. The Greek library, with all the rough drafts and provisional editions of the writings of Philodemus, as well as the second copies of his works, presents an insurmountable obstacle for those who do not believe in the Piso hypothesis, which remains the most successful and the most grounded of all.
4. Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus was most likely the owner of the house during the first half of the first century BCE, and for a short time thereafter; there are no grounds for denying that he had the building erected.
5. If, as some archeologists and art historians maintain, the construction of the Villa in its entirety dates back to the third quarter of the same century, the chances that it had belonged to Caesoninus are slim, but still extant. Piso, who was born in 101 BCE, might have had the Villa built when he was in his sixties (if the building was erected in 40) or seventies (if the building was erected in 30 BCE). The hypothesis that it was there that the politician welcomed his protégé, Philodemus, remains valid as well. It is hard not to think that the Gadaran visited him occasionally with his friends, the Augustan intellectuals Plotius Tucca, Lucius Varius, Quintilius Varus, and the great Vergil, to whom he refers often in his *On Vices and Their Opposing Virtues*, likely composed during the mid-first century BCE.
6. The three small busts of Epicurus, the two of Hermarchus, and the bronze statue of a month-old female piglet found in the east edge of the rectangular peristyle are important elements that increase, if it be possible, the Epicurean presence in the Villa.
7. The sculptural decoration forms an articulate and quite varied whole, likely developed, as maintained by Lorenz and Mattusch, over a rather long stretch of time. Because of its variety it is hard to provide a univocal interpretation. Developing a general framework can lead to erroneous conclusions. We can grant that Philodemus offered suggestions on some pieces, but I wonder if it is too easy to assume that the sculptural decoration reflects the entirety of his



work, or a good part thereof. Nonetheless, if this was the case, should we not have found traces of Philodemus's suggestions in the wall decorations as well, at least in the surviving section? It seems to me more prudent to consider the sculpture gallery of the Villa to be mostly the result of subsequent acquisitions, reflecting the tastes and needs of the various owners and the fashionable esthetics of their time.

8. There is no reason not to believe that after the death of Caesoninus (we do not know precisely when after 43 BCE) the Villa passed to Piso Pontifex, who may very well have added more Epicurean texts to the Villa's library—at least if Cavallo is correct in his dating of papyri from Epicurus, Metrodorus, Colotes, Polystratus, Demetrius Laco, and Philodemus himself between the end of the first century BCE and the beginning of the first century CE.<sup>125</sup> We cannot rule out that the building had been built by Pontifex. In that case, however, the construction can only date back to when Pontifex was at least twenty years old, meaning approximately around 30 BCE. As D. Armstrong suggests, the Villa might have been built by Caesoninus's two children, Calpurnia (who married C. Julius Caesar in 59 BCE and was born in 75 BCE) and Pontifex (who was born in 48 BCE, twenty-seven years after his sister), in order to honor their father and his beloved protégé, Philodemus. But this remains a theoretical hypothesis without any evidence to confirm it. Moreover, I wonder why Calpurnia would have chosen a Villa to honor the memory of her father and his intellectual friend.
9. The Villa might have remained in the hands of the *gens Calpurnia* until the catastrophe of 79 CE, just like the villa of Gaius Calpurnius Piso in Baiae, which from the Augustan period to the Neronian belonged without interruption to the Calpurnii.<sup>126</sup>

## THE GREEK LIBRARY OF THE VILLA

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The analysis of the graphic typology, carried out by Cavallo in 1983, has been fundamental to the diachronic framing of the Greek library of the Villa.<sup>127</sup> The analysis allowed us to develop for the first time a valid

hypothesis on the gradual composition of the library. The graphic examination is at times supported by testimony, so to speak, internal to the texts. In any case, we should not forget that a paleographic dating always holds relative value, and so the historical profile of the Greek books section that we can offer today is susceptible to variation.

To the best of our present knowledge, the Greek section of the library is almost entirely comprised of Epicurean texts. It appears to be formed from three principal sources: an original one, including rolls containing writings from Epicurus and other members of the school (Carneiscus, Polystratus, Demetrius Laco, and Zeno of Sidon), datable back to the third, second, or, at the latest, second–first century BCE; a second source consisting of the books on a variety of topics composed by the Gadaran himself after he came to Italy (approximately 75–40 BCE); and a third group of texts by various Epicureans that was added to the library after Philodemus’s death (end of the first century BCE–beginning of the first century CE).<sup>128</sup>

## **Who Collected and Brought to Italy the Books of Epicurus and the Other Masters of the Garden?**

There are two things that lead us to believe that the first stock of Greek books was assembled outside of Italy.<sup>129</sup> First, the materials date back to sometime between the third and the end of the second century or the beginning of the first century BCE. But even at the beginning of the first century BCE, Epicureanism had not spread widely enough among educated Romans to justify a production and use for the texts of the school. Second, some rolls (in particular those of Demetrius Laco) show signs of a peculiar graphic that, according to Cavallo, can be located in the Eastern Mediterranean. This leads us to think that the Herculaneum library started taking shape in Palestine or, more likely, in Greece.<sup>130</sup> The library might have been first collected by Zeno of Sidon, who led the school around 100 BCE, or by Philodemus himself before his arrival in Italy, of course, in which case we can probably place it around 75 BCE at the latest. Or the library might have been collected by someone else.

As discussed, the books were quite likely brought to Italy by Philodemus in connection with his desire to popularize the Epicurean doctrines in Rome.<sup>131</sup> It has been proposed that the original core of Epicurean texts, “collected by Philodemus in Athens, actually belonged to Demetrius Lacon, who was contemporary with most of the rolls that were passing on his works.”<sup>132</sup> We might be inclined to believe this hypothesis because of the discussed ties between Laco and the Roman world; in that case, Philodemus might have recovered them and placed them in the Herculaneum Villa.

Very recently this reconstruction was questioned by G. W. Houston,<sup>133</sup> who called it reasonable, but not at all sure, and in any case “impossible to prove”; in his view the reconstruction, although generally accepted by scholars, is founded essentially on paleographic bases, which are necessarily approximate and moreover may be “slippery”. To fix the time in which a text was transcribed in a Herculaneum papyrus is not to establish the era in which the papyrus became part of the book collection of the Villa, in the sense that it may have been added to it later. Houston also notes that we do not know the size of the Herculaneum library over time, in the sense that we do not know if and how many rolls may have been removed because damaged, or lost because donated or loaned and not recovered, or even sold. Moreover, according to Houston, if archeologists and art historians are right to trace back the construction of the Villa and the sculptures preserved in it to a time not earlier than the third quarter of the first century BCE and more specifically between 40 and 30 (or even 20) BCE, namely several decades after the arrival of Philodemus in Italy, the argument that it was Philodemus who brought from Greece the oldest Herculaneum scrolls weakens further. In this case, the Villa may even have been built after the death of the man who is considered its most likely owner, namely Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, who we know is still active in 43 BCE; after that year we do not have more news about him, so he may have died in that year or soon after. Consequently Houston puts forward two hypotheses:

1. A wealthy Roman bought a collection of Greek books (containing a certain amount of Epicurean texts), that he later brought to Italy (to his house in Rome or to his country villa), like Cicero, who bought or hoped to buy a Greek library with the help of Atticus.

Subsequently Philodemus may have been attracted to those books, as well as Tyrannion and other Greeks who were interested in the libraries that Lucullus and Sulla brought to Italy from the East. That Roman could have invited Philodemus to organize his books, like Cicero, who after returning from exile asked Tyrannion to arrange his library and, later, Augustus, who commissioned the poet Pompeius Macer with the task of organizing the Palatine library.

2. A Roman of the early Imperial period, interested in Epicurean philosophy, purchased Philodemus's writings from his heirs and deposited them in his villa at Herculaneum, along with others that he collected or commissioned to copy. The presence of stichometric notes in many Herculaneum rolls could indicate that those texts were not transcribed by slaves inside the Villa (which may have been built at a time subsequent to that in which many of those texts appear to have been outlined), but expressly commissioned to professional scribes who worked in Rome, and only later transferred to Herculaneum at the end of the first century BCE. The transfer may have been an opportunity to restore the shabby scrolls, as suggested by Del Mastro,<sup>134</sup> who believes that at the end of that century some *volumina* were restored.

According to Dorandi,<sup>135</sup> the dating of the construction of the Villa in the third quarter of the first century BCE does not question the belonging of the library to Philodemus and helps better explain the presence in it of the group of scrolls dating back to a post-Philodemian era. He accepts the opinion of Cavallo<sup>136</sup> who claims that the late acquisitions of scrolls in the Villa's library were due not to a "planned book increase but rather—and always for philosophical interests—to both a sort of *renovatio librorum* to replace exemplary worn *volumina*, especially scrolls that dated back to the third-second century BCE, and some individual copying activity.

The two alternative hypotheses suggested by Houston are not unlikely, but we can wonder whether we need to introduce another hypothetical, undetermined person into the reconstruction. It is Philodemus who becomes Epicurean in Athens; it is he who attends the school library; it is he who moves to Italy, with the plan to diffuse the doctrines of the Kepos; he is the person who, for professional purposes, most likely picked up and brought to

Italy the most ancient scrolls of Epicurus and other Epicureans of the first generation; as I said, he could also have brought some and acquired others after his arrival in Italy. I add that the fundamental objections raised by Houston against the Philodemian hypothesis are weak: it is true that it is based largely on the sometimes-misleading paleography, but in this case the paleography is supported by relevant historical and cultural considerations; and it is also true that, as claimed by Houston, to determine the date of transcription of a roll is not to establish the date of its addition to the library of the Villa. Houston refers to the case of *P.Herc.* 1149/993, containing Book 2 of Epicurus's *Περὶ φύσεως*, the end of which includes the name of an unidentified Roman, Marcus Octavius, a name also affixed by the same hand at the end of *P.Herc.* 336/1150, which contains the treatise *Περὶ ἀλόγου καταφρονήσεως* by Polystratus. While Epicurus's text was transcribed in the third—second century BCE, the other was copied in the late first century BCE: Houston thinks that *P.Herc.* 1149/993 in particular does not harmonize with the Philodemian hypothesis. On the contrary, it seems to me that there is no conflict. Octavius may have been the owner of the two rolls: he might have lived in the first half of the first century BCE or even later and have acquired the two rolls, affixed his name, and then sold or given them to the owner of the Villa. Neither does the fact that *P.Herc.* 1149/993 has been outlined by the same hand that wrote other books of the primary work of Epicurus (as has been said, 25, 28, and 34) and therefore was part of a single edition (total or partial) pose a problem. Octavius could have possessed all the rolls of that edition, which would then somehow have got into the library of the Villa. In any case, according to Houston, the hypothesis that Philodemus collected most of the books of the Villa can be accepted, as long as we do not admit that any ancient scroll belonged to the core of the collection: a particular roll may have joined the books of the Villa at any time in many possible ways.

## Philodemus's Works

The Early Philosophical Activity of the Gadaran:  
Historiographical, Ethical, Musical, and Rhetorical Writings (c.  
75–50 BCE)

To the original stock of books in the library, Philodemus added over time the works he composed while in Italy in order to spread Epicurean philosophy. According to Cavallo<sup>137</sup> “in the Herculaneum Villa Philodemus—around which a circle of men of letters and followers of the Epicurean doctrine is to be believed—he certainly wrote part of his treatises, perhaps even most, but not all since it is possible that some of them were composed in whole or in part before his stay in the Villa of Herculaneum, the latter to refer to a period between the middle of the first century BCE and a date certainly after 40.”

Based on the dating of the graphic typologies in which the rolls were transcribed, Philodemus’s philosophical production can be divided into two stages: the early treatises (c. 75–50 BCE) and those reflecting his mature thought (c. 50–40 BCE).<sup>138</sup> The initial writings seem to have been works of philosophical historiography, since the oldest papyri contain books from *Σύνταξις τῶν φιλοσόφων* and from *Περὶ Ἐπικούρου*, as well as *Περὶ τῶν Στοικῶν* and *Περὶ τῶν Ἐπικούρου καὶ τινων ἄλλων πραγμάτων*.

Perhaps used four centuries later by Diogenes Laertius as a structural model for his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (10.3), the *Ordering of the Philosophers* is a manual on the history of philosophy, consisting of ten books that cover the entire development of Greek thought, from the Presocratics to the Hellenistic philosophers, including the Epicureans. The work is not a straightforward philosophical polemic. The author gathers excerpts from previous philosophical historiography and relies on the principle of succession in order to present, without hostility and for the benefit of the largest possible circle of Roman readers, the facts and figures defining the internal development of Greek thought. From the *Syntaxis* there seems to have survived a book dedicated to the academic school (in the anepigraphic *P.Herc.* 1021, which contains an outline of the text dating back to the second quarter of the first century BCE, and in *P.Herc.* 164, which contains the final version and dates back either to the end of the first century BCE or the beginning of the first century CE), as well as another book dedicated to the Stoics (in the anepigraphic *P.Herc.* 1018, dating back to sometime between the end of the first century BCE and the beginning of the first century CE).<sup>139</sup> From a bibliological perspective, a good deal of interest is raised by *P.Herc.* 1021, an opisthographic roll showing the progressive “external” evolution of a Philodemian book.<sup>140</sup>

We cannot be completely certain that *P.Herc.* 495 and 558, which contain both an early draft and the final version of the story of Socrates and his school, belong to the *Ordering of the Philosophers*.<sup>141</sup> Nor can we be certain that *P.Herc.* 1780, which offers a history of Epicureanism, belongs to that work.<sup>142</sup> Even more uncertain is whether we can attribute to the same work two papyri recovered in very poor condition: *P.Herc.* 327 and 1508, which were perhaps respectively concerned with the schools of the Eleatics and Abderites, and that of Pythagoras.<sup>143</sup>

To the early stage of Philodemus's philosophical activity belongs the work *On Epicurus*, of which *P.Herc.* 1289 and 1232 give us the second book and an unknown book (perhaps the first), respectively.<sup>144</sup> To the same stage belongs his *Treatise on the Memory of Epicurus and Others*, recovered from *P.Herc.* 1418. The two texts fit well in the encomiastic-commemorative genre that was especially cultivated in the Garden, where it served as a valid educational tool and, at the same time, an expression of the disciples' pride in being part of the noble Epicurean school. The first text celebrates the affability and wisdom of the founder through a series of vignettes on the daily life of the original community; for these vignettes Philodemus makes use of epistolary excerpts from Epicurus. The second text similarly relies heavily on the letters of Epicurus and other illustrious figures from the first generation of the school. A duplicate copy of this text is preserved in *P.Herc.* 310, a quite fragmentary roll that, judging from the writing, might have been added to the library after the death of Philodemus.<sup>145</sup> The letters do not hold strictly doctrinal content, but focus constantly on the simple moments of daily life as it happened within the circle of those philosophers.<sup>146</sup>

A work of historiographic polemic entitled *Περὶ τῶν Στωικῶν*, *On the Stoics*, is preserved in *P.Herc.* 339 and 155. These two rolls were basically contemporary, and from them a provisional draft and final edition of the text, respectively, have been recovered.<sup>147</sup>

In the first stage of his philosophical activity, Philodemus also considered moral themes and the debated problem of the educational role of disciplines like music and rhetoric.<sup>148</sup> Treatment of ethical matters can be found in *Περὶ παρρησίας*, *On Frankness*, preserved by *P.Herc.* 1471. From the *subscriptio* we learn that it was part of the more expansive treatise *Περὶ ῥηθῶν καὶ βίων*, *On Characters and Ways of Life*, a work examining the



most significant phases in the practice of life by which moral perfection can be achieved and, along with it, absolute tranquility and perfect happiness. Philodemus composed the book *On Frankness* by re-elaborating some lectures by Zeno of Sidon. The central theme of the work is the relationship between the wise educator and the pupil being educated, a relationship that is fundamentally regulated by freedom of expression.<sup>149</sup>

Treatment of ethical matters can also be found in *Περὶ μανίας*, *De Insania* (*P.Herc.* 57), and *Περὶ ὀργῆς*, *On Anger* (*P.Herc.* 182). These show the Gadaran's commitment to exploring human nature and to identifying all that can trouble humans and make them unhappy. It is possible that they were single books of a larger work entitled *Περὶ παθῶν*, although the title is not attested in the Herculaneum materials.<sup>150</sup> The first treatise is rather fragmentary and not yet readable in a reliable edition.<sup>151</sup> The second, which is the oldest text uncovered on the topic, examines in depth the phenomena and behaviors related to anger.<sup>152</sup> For the Epicureans, anger is a *pathos*, that is to say a natural phenomenon that needs to be controlled somehow, but cannot be eradicated. For this reason anger can, in some circumstances, be justified even for the wise man.

The three works dedicated to the role of liberal arts in education—*Περὶ μουσικῆς*, *Περὶ ῥητορικῆς*, and *Περὶ ποιημάτων*—are wide-ranging. The graphic typology leads us to believe that the first and the second were composed by Philodemus in the second quarter of the first century BCE. The third was, according to Cavallo and as we will see below, composed sometime after 50 BCE.

*On Music* was comprised of at least four books, as we can deduce from the *subscriptio* in *P.Herc.* 1497, the best preserved of the rolls from which parts of the work have been recovered. The other materials are more fragmentary: *P.Herc.* 225, 411, 424, 1094, 1572, 1575, 1576, 1578, and 1583. For the vast majority of these, what has survived are residual portions of the so-called “husking” (*scorzatura*) and the drawings.<sup>153</sup> According to Delattre, all these papyri belong to the fourth book of the work.<sup>154</sup> *On Rhetoric* was likely of greater length and, as it seems, articulated in at least ten books and composed over a rather long period of time.<sup>155</sup> The following parts have survived: the first book for certain (*P.Herc.* 1427 + 234, 250, 398 (?), 410, 453, 1601 (?) 1612 (?), 1619); the second (*P.Herc.* 1674 + 425, 1079, 1086, 1580, a provisional first draft, or *hypomnēma*, in two rolls;

*P.Herc.* 1672 + 408, 409, 1117, 1573, 1574, a second, final draft, in one roll); likely the third (*P.Herc.* 1506, a first draft, or *hypomnēma*; *P.Herc.* 1426 + 240, 421, 455, 467, 468, 1095, 1096, 1099, 1101, 1633, 1646, a second, final draft). Such books might have been composed in the period 75–50 BCE. Others have also been uncovered: the fourth book (rather long, hence stretching over two tomes, respectively found in *P.Herc.* 1423 + 221, 232, 245, 426, 463 and in *P.Herc.* 1007/1673 + 224, 1077a, 1114, 1677a); the eighth (*P.Herc.* 1015/832); perhaps the ninth (*P.Herc.* 1004); likely the tenth (*P.Herc.* 220, 473, 1078/1080, 1118, 1669, 1693); the other undetermined books are included in *P.Herc.* 238, 434, 435, 469, 470, and 1608.<sup>156</sup> Books 4–10 were perhaps composed after the mid-first century BCE.<sup>157</sup>

As pointed out by Gigante, *On Music*, *On Rhetoric*, and *On Poems* represent a great trilogy used by the author to demonstrate how the liberal arts (*mathēmata*) can contribute to the philosophical development of the person and certainly do not constitute an obstacle to achieving happiness.<sup>158</sup> Philodemus's recognition of the value of music, rhetoric, and poetry marks a shift from the original position of Epicurus and Demetrius Laco, for whom wisdom can only be obtained through the study of nature (*physiologia*). For Gigante, Philodemus remains basically faithful to the masters, and yet he applies a real cultural change to Epicureanism, one that he believes is very much needed in order to popularize his own doctrines in contemporary Rome.

### *The Mature Works of the Gadaran: On Poems, Writings on Ethics, Theology, Political Ideology, and Gnoseology (c. 50–40 BCE)*

The Gadaran completed his engagé trilogy on the liberal arts with *On Poems*, which he began to write sometime after the mid-first century BCE, as we are led to believe by a paleographic examination of the rolls. The work comprised at least five books, of which, according to the reconstruction by Janko, we can be certain the following survived: the fourth (in *P.Herc.* 207), and the fifth (in *P.Herc.* 1581, 403, 407, 228, 1425, from which we have recovered the entire book, and in *P.Herc.* 1538, which preserves only the second half), which was perhaps dedicated to Calpurnius.<sup>159</sup> It is also likely that the first book survived (in *P.Herc.* 444, 460, 466, 1073, 1074a, 1081a), the second (in *P.Herc.* 1074b, 1419 frs. 11–12, 14–16, 18, 1677a, 1081b,

1676, 994), and the third (in *P.Herc.* 1087, 1403).<sup>160</sup> The position held by Philodemus regarding poetry is, in comparison to other topics, much looser than Epicurus's. The founder decisively condemned poetry, whereas for Philodemus the contrast between philosophy and poetry was much less clear; as we have seen, he composed epigrams and resorted more frequently than Epicurus to poetry and concepts expressed by poets in order to render his demonstrations more lively and effective. According to Janko, one of the goals of the treatise was to demonstrate, in an age with high levels of education, that wise Epicureans could ponder the greatest works of Greek literature on equal footing with philosophical rivals.<sup>161</sup> The Gadaran was more generous towards cultured people than Epicurus was, for he wrote that "only educated people can understand [poetry], and above all [its] excellence."<sup>162</sup> It would not have been fitting for a leading Epicurean of the time not to know, and to admit to not knowing, the great classics of Greek literature.

*P.Herc.* 1507 dates back to the second half of the first century BCE and contains *Περὶ τοῦ καθ' Ὅμηρον ἀγαθοῦ βασιλέως*, *On the Good King According to Homer*.<sup>163</sup> This was a rather original work in which Philodemus used Homeric models to show the figure of the *optimus princeps* to Piso Caesoninus, to whom the writing is dedicated and who was likely the owner of the Villa. According to the Gadaran, the good sovereign should be, among other things, virtuous, gentle, and balanced, since leadership is consolidated by benevolence and friendship—both Epicurean virtues.<sup>164</sup>

From the graphic typology, *P.Herc.* 1005/862 can be dated back to the second half of the first century. It contains the first book of a polemical treatise, of which unfortunately the title is not preserved entirely, so two possible restorations have been proposed: *Πρὸς τοὺς φασκοβυβλιακοὺς* (Del Mastro)<sup>165</sup> or *φαυλοβυβλιακοὺς* (Puglia).<sup>166</sup>

Philodemus addressed the writing to his school companions, criticizing some of the Epicureans who had disagreements with the Athenian school, led by Zeno of Sidon, on interpretations of certain aspects of the founding masters' thought, such as on the veneration of the wise, on the organization and goals of doctrinal compendia, and on the fight against encyclopedic knowledge.<sup>167</sup> A second copy of that book is contained in *P.Herc.* 1485.<sup>168</sup>

In the work *Περὶ τῶν κακιῶν καὶ τῶν ἀντικειμένων ἀρετῶν*, *On Vices and Their Opposing Virtues*, the Gadaran is mostly focused on the exposition of ethical problems and the solutions by which to resolve them.<sup>169</sup> As such it is “the true counterpart to the already published *On Characters and Ways of Life*.”<sup>170</sup> The title of this treatise has come to us in these three other versions: *Περὶ τῶν κακιῶν καὶ τῶν ἀντικειμένων ἀρετῶν ἐν οἷς εἶσι καὶ περὶ ἃ*, *Περὶ κακιῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν οἷς εἶσι καὶ περὶ ἃ*, *Περὶ κακιῶν*. The four versions of the title show beyond any doubt, as already observed, that the attention of Philodemus as *philosophus medicans* was essentially directed at vices and their therapy.<sup>171</sup> The analysis of a vice was the principal issue, and any reference to its contrasting virtue was made in the context of that analysis. The more extended version of the title is significant and can be translated: *On Vices and Their Opposing Virtues, Of What They Consist and the Things Close to Them*. Philodemus thus intends a truly complete examination of the vices. They are analyzed in their totality: in relation to their opposing virtues, in their constitutive structure and, finally, in relation to whatever is somehow related to them. The treatment therefore included that which is similar to the vices in the sense that the author, having identified a vice, examined it at length by dwelling on all the negative behaviors that can be considered an expression of that vice. In such an arrangement there was, of course, a place for analyzing on occasion the virtue opposing the vice in question. But that analysis remained in the context of the analysis of the vice such that there was not an alternating exposition whereby one book dedicated to a specific vice was followed by one in which the opposing virtue was discussed. In the same book one vice was discussed, and possibly the contrasting virtue. The breadth of Philodemus’s expositive project is confirmed by the total number of books comprising the work: at least ten.<sup>172</sup> Based on the graphical analysis of the materials, Cavallo dates the work “sometime after the first half of the 1st century B.C.”<sup>173</sup>

A total of twenty-four papyri have been attributed at different times to *De vitiis*. We are currently missing a modern edition of the full work. We can, in any case, ascribe to it with either certainty or great likelihood the following rolls: Book 1: *Περὶ κολακείας*, *On Flattery* (*P.Herc.* 222, perhaps with *P.Herc.* 223, 1082, 1089, 1092, 1643, 1675); Book 2 (?): *Περὶ τῶν κολακείᾳ ὁμοειδῶν*, *On the Vices Similar to Flattery* (*P.Herc.* 1457);

an uncertain book, possibly *Περὶ φιλαργυρίας*, *On Greed* (*P.Herc.* 253, 415, 465, 1090, 1613, 896); another uncertain book, possibly *Περὶ διαβολῆς*, *On Slander* (*P.Herc.* Paris 2); Book 9: *Περὶ οἰκονομίας*, *On Economy* (*P.Herc.* 1424); and Book 10: *Περὶ ὑπερηφανίας*, *On Arrogance* (*P.Herc.* 1008).<sup>174</sup> The fact that the work opened with at least a couple of books dedicated to flattery and its related vices can be explained: the author must have felt the urgency to analyze what was in his view the most pervasive and corrosive vice in Rome at that time. In *P.Herc.* 222, the Gadaran strongly denies that a parallel exists between the behavior of the scholar and that of the flatterer: the action of the former and not the latter has a pedagogical goal and does not corrupt, but rather aims at revealing the vices of men so that they will be freed from them.<sup>175</sup> The author later touches upon the difference between flattery and friendship (the virtue which was for the Epicureans opposed to *kolakeia*, according to the Aristotelian scheme), and upon the limit to be given to the love of glory.<sup>176</sup> From the very fragmentary *P.Herc.* 1089<sup>177</sup> and 223<sup>178</sup> we find Philodemus presenting the relation between flattery and power, recalling famous flatterers like Timagoras, the Athenian ambassador to King Artaxerxes II in 367 BCE. In this context, the figure of Alexander Magnus was paradigmatic. This is shown in *P.Herc.* 1675,<sup>179</sup> where the author illustrates the different attitudes towards the Macedonian monarch displayed by two intellectuals in his entourage: the philosopher Anaxarchus of Abdera, who on one occasion was treated with insolence by the ruler and responded with a clever threat,<sup>180</sup> and the historian Callisthenes of Olynthus, who was guilty of having a contradictory attitude towards Alexander insofar as he refused to perform *proskynesis* before him, but wrote about him as if he were a god.<sup>181</sup> For Philodemus the difference between flattery and wisdom was clear-cut and did not allow for compromise. In his eyes, the comportment of those two men in the face of power was therefore certainly not exemplary.

In *P.Herc.* 1457, which is dedicated to an examination of the vices related to flattery, the Gadaran illustrates the behavior, among other things, of the person who is always hurrying to talk about other people's words and attitudes, as well as the behavior of the *ἄρεσκος*, the pleaser, a peculiar type of flatterer who is always ready to agree and comply.<sup>182</sup> Philodemus (col. VI, fr. 7 and col. VII) quotes chapter 5 of Theophrastus's *Characters*, and this text provided by the Epicurean is the oldest we possess.<sup>183</sup>

*P.Herc.* 1082 is very fragmentary.<sup>184</sup> In one of its passages, Philodemus speaks directly to his four Roman friends belonging to the Augustan circle: Lucius Varius Rufus, Vergil, Quintilius Varus, and Plotius Tucca. These are the same friends he addresses in *P.Herc.* 253, which concerns *φιλαργυρία* and is probably part of *Περὶ κακιῶν*. In this work, then, the Epicurean has as interlocutors the same four erudite men who likely contributed to his own philosophical thinking, as we learn from the last column of *P.Herc.* Paris 2. This last text was written with a graphic typology close to the vast majority of the papyri linked to the *Περὶ κακιῶν*, and it likely contained a book by Philodemus dedicated to slander.<sup>185</sup> Based on this third mention of the name Varius Rufus, in 1991 Gigante proposed again, and with new arguments, that the poem *The Battle of Actium*, preserved in *P.Herc.* 817, should be attributed to this intellectual in the Augustan circle who was an elegiac, epic, and tragic poet.<sup>186</sup> According to Gigante, since Horace (*Sat.* 1, 10, 43–44; *Carm.* 1.6.1–4; *Epist.* 1, 16, 25–29) attests with certainty that Varius wrote an epic poem in several books in honor of Augustus and Agrippa, it could be that this poem was the one contained in *P.Herc.* 817. In his *On Vices and Their Opposing Virtues*, Philodemus also addresses his Augustan friends, Varius among them, and therefore it is not at all odd that the epic poem composed by this friend was present among the books of the Herculaneum Villa. For Gigante, Philodemus (whose treatise *On Death*, at least according to Rostagni,<sup>187</sup> influenced a homonymous poem by Varius based on Epicurean ideology) delineates in *On the Good King According to Homer* the figure of the *optimus princeps*. This figure was the enemy of sedition and tyranny, contributing to the antityrannical notions held by Varius and Horace himself. The Gadaran, the resident philosopher, and Varius, who was engaged in composing his epic poem, could converse on shared topics of interest while walking in the garden of the Villa adorned with images of rulers.<sup>188</sup>

The *subscriptio* in the ninth book of the *Περὶ κακιῶν*, preserved in *P.Herc.* 1424, in contrast to those in *P.Herc.* 222 and 1457, does not present the topic of the book, yet it is certainly dedicated to the *οἰκονομία*, the management of one's estate, a sphere of life in which individual behavior can be balanced and full of virtue, or unbalanced and immoral. In substance, the book is directed against the *Oeconomicus* by Xenophon and the homonymous treatise commonly attributed to Theophrastus.



Philodemus, in line with Epicurus and Metrodorus (from whom he quotes more or less verbatim a large passage from *Περὶ πλούτου*), holds that only the wise can soundly manage property, since he knows the *συμφέρον*, the “fitting,” meaning the limit set by nature.<sup>189</sup> The wise man is thereby able to satisfy his own needs and those of his friends; excessive love for wealth is to be condemned, given that its victims egoistically tend to avoid helping others and nurturing friendships, which represent the only firm possession in the face of life’s adversities.<sup>190</sup>

In *Περὶ οἰκονομίας* Philodemus develops arguments previously discussed in a work of at least two books, *Περὶ πλούτου*, recalled by the Epicurean himself in the same ninth book of *De vitiis* (col. 12, 21 Jensen). We have recovered fragmented parts of the first book of *Περὶ πλούτου* in *P.Herc.* 163, transcribed sometime between 50–25 BCE.<sup>191</sup> In that text the author discusses the relation between the wise man and wealth, and again there the point of reference is the view on the subject expressed by Metrodorus in the homonymous treatise, *Περὶ πλούτου*. Philodemus believes that the wise man must settle for a modest patrimony such that he is able to satisfy his natural and necessary needs, whereas those who love money excessively are constantly victims of anguish and worry for fear of losing what they have. Philodemus offers consolatory words to the poor as well. In his view, they have to find comfort in philosophy, which can obtain the same pleasure from poverty and wealth.<sup>192</sup>

The *subscriptio* for *P.Herc.* 1008, which preserves the tenth book *Περὶ κακιῶν*, does not report the content of the book, but in any case it concerns *ὑπερηφανία*, arrogance.<sup>193</sup> After sketching the arrogant person, the author quotes text from a letter by the Peripatetic Aristo of Ceos that is dedicated to the theme *On Relieving Arrogance*, *Περὶ τοῦ κουφίζειν ὑπερηφανίας*. The Epicurean challenges his opponent for having, among other things, only taken into consideration the arrogance stemming from good fortune, and neglecting the arrogance born from philosophy.<sup>194</sup> Angeli and I have conducted a thorough examination of the place where Philodemus quotes the title of Aristo’s work, and we have proven conclusively that it was a letter and not, as previously held, an epistolary treatise or epitome.<sup>195</sup> The vast majority of critics believe that Philodemus’s opponent is the Peripatetic



Aristo. According to Ioppolo<sup>196</sup> and Ranocchia,<sup>197</sup> he should be the Stoic Aristo, but their arguments remain unconvincing.<sup>198</sup>

No title of Philodemean papyri attests that one or more books of the *De vitiis* was dedicated to avarice. The first to envisage, albeit vaguely, the possible existence of a section *Περὶ φιλαργυρίας* was Comparetti in 1883, and he did so on the basis of the recurring presence of the word *φιλαργυρία* in the drawings of four papyri subject to *scorzatura* (husking) (*P.Herc.* 253, 465, 1090, 1613).<sup>199</sup> Further advances were made more recently by Dorandi and Spinelli.<sup>200</sup> They started from the fact that a number of papyri traditionally attributed to *Περὶ φιλαργυρίας*, as shown by Cavallo, were outlined by the same scribe. These papyri are, to be specific: *P.Herc.* 253, 465, 896, 1613, and the fr. 8, 9, 10, 12 of *P.Herc.* 1077, to which *P.Herc.* 1090 should be added, in their opinion, along with its *scorza* (husk), which was traditionally believed to be lost, but has been found in three of the four fragments from *P.Herc.* 1077. According to Dorandi and Spinelli, *P.Herc.* 253, 465, 896, 1090, and 1613 “combine to form one roll (or more?) that originally contained a writing from Philodemus discussing the vice of *φιλαργυρία*.”<sup>201</sup> They also recognize that there is a possibility that *P.Herc.* 415—of which we have the residual husk, not at all readable today, and three drawings—may be part of this group. As I believe I have demonstrated elsewhere, it is possible that these *scorze* (*P.Herc.* 253, 415, 465, 1090, 1613) and the *midollo* (marrow) (*P.Herc.* 896) originally constituted a single *volumen* that was dedicated to *φιλαργυρία* and that first underwent a partial cut of *scorzatura*, and then at a later time an unrolling with Piaggio’s machine.<sup>202</sup>

If the attribution of some rather fragmentary papyri<sup>203</sup> to *Περὶ κακιῶν* appears extremely uncertain, it is to be ruled out for two treatises that we have received in less precarious condition and for which we have the *subscriptio*: the *Περὶ ὁμιλίας*, *On Conversation*, and *Περὶ χάριτος*, *On Gratitude*. The former treatise is comprised of at least two books, the first being preserved in *P.Herc.* 1399,<sup>204</sup> and the second in *P.Herc.* 873.<sup>205</sup> The work is dedicated to conversation as an important part of the didactic activity pursued in the Epicurean school in general, and in Philodemus’s circle in particular. The latter treatise analyzes one of the cornerstones of the Epicurean lifestyle in all of its aspects: gratitude—of man towards nature for allowing for the satisfaction of basic needs; of pupils towards

their master for guiding them to the good; and of one who has received help towards the one who gave it, and vice versa.<sup>206</sup> The two writings could be part of the work *Περὶ ἡθῶν καὶ βίων*, to which certainly belongs the aforementioned *De libertate dicendi*.<sup>207</sup>

In his philosophical maturity Philodemus also dealt with the problem of the gods, dedicating three works to a complex analysis of the topic: *Περὶ προνοίας*, *Περὶ εὐσεβείας*, and *Περὶ θεῶν*. The first of these has likely survived in the anepigraphic *P.Herc.* 1670, which according to Cavallo is paleographically similar to the rolls of *De vitiis* and *De musica*. The work aims at dismantling the Stoic conception of divine *pronoia*. The Stoics admit that the world, which they assume is unique and perfect, can be saved by providential design. Philodemus asks how they can explain the presence of evil, disease, pestilence, and other catastrophes. For the Epicurean, it is absurd to think that everything is regulated by *pronoia*, as there are things that must happen out of necessity and cannot happen by divine providence.<sup>208</sup>

*Περὶ εὐσεβείας* has survived for us in a series of anepigraphic rolls, of which in many cases only the *scorza* remains. At least eight of them (*P.Herc.* 1428, 229, 243, 433, 1077 fr. 11, 1088, 1609, 1610) have been transcribed, according to Cavallo, by the same hand sometime in the second half of the first century BCE. Two more (*P.Herc.* 242 and 247) were produced by the same scribe and seem to date back to a period between the mid-first century BCE and either the late first century BCE or early first century CE. The work, divided in two parts, according to Obbink, has a significant documentary value since the definition of the Epicurean concept of *pietas* is presented through a critique of the theology of the poets (Homer, Hesiod, Mimnermus, and Pindar) and the other philosophers from Thales to the Stoics.<sup>209</sup> The largest roll of the group, *P.Herc.* 1428, is dedicated in particular to the Stoics, according to whom the divinities are nothing but an expression of the same god who manifests itself in all the different elements of nature: earth, air, fire, and water. The Epicureans opposed this form of divine immanentism, as they supported the two cornerstones of popular religion, anthropomorphism and polytheism.<sup>210</sup>

The work *On the Gods* was comprised of at least three books. The definitive edition of the first book has survived in *P.Herc.* 26, and likely the provisional draft of the third has survived in *P.Herc.* 152/157, which is

noteworthy both for the slightly different title (*Περὶ τῆς θεῶν διαγωγῆς*, *On the Lifestyle of the Gods*) and the many abbreviations and annotations in the margins. In this work, Philodemus is primarily concerned with the divinities considered as living beings. His goal is evidently polemic; defending the gods' anthropomorphism was a way of combating the criticisms of rivals. For the Gadaran it was possible to reconcile the two cornerstones of Epicurean theology: the imperturbable happiness and the eternity of the Gods, and their human form and physiology.<sup>211</sup>

*P.Herc.* 346 was crafted in the latter half of the first century BCE and contained an anepigraphic treatise that is perhaps to be attributed to Philodemus. One of the main themes seems to be *λ'οίκεῖλον*, personal interest, towards which the wise man has a different attitude than the masses.<sup>212</sup>

The graphical analysis of materials dating back to the third quarter of the first century BCE might lead us to set the following three writings at more or less the height of Philodemus's activity: the so-called *Ethica Comparetti*, *Περὶ σημείων καὶ σημειώσεων*, *On Signs and Inferences*, and the fourth book of *Περὶ θανάτου*, *On Death*.

The *Ethica Comparetti* (*P.Herc.* 1251, anepigraphic)<sup>213</sup> owes its name to Domenico Comparetti (1835–1927), the great scholar of Herculaneum papyrology<sup>214</sup> who first understood its importance and produced two editions in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>215</sup> According to Gigante, who studied the text at length and proposed its attribution to Philodemus on good grounds, the original title might have been *Περὶ αἰρήσεων καὶ φυγῶν*, *On Choices and Avoidances*.<sup>216</sup> There the author examines the great problems of existence: good, evil, laws, death, wealth, past, present, and future, showing one by one the best way to face them and resolve them. In a recent edition of the papyrus, Indelli and Tsouna have confirmed the hypothesis of Philodemus's authorship.<sup>217</sup>

The work *On Signs and Inferences*, preserved in *P.Herc.* 1065, is a defense of inference by analogy, which was the foundation of Epicurean gnoseology and attacked by the Stoics.<sup>218</sup> For the Epicureans, it is legitimate to make use of objects or events that exist or happen before our eyes in order to infer, by analogy, characteristics of objects and events that are far from our perception. The writing, which is readable today in the (not

always impeccable) edition by De Lacy,<sup>219</sup> gives evidence that there was, in comparison to Epicurus, a deepening of the concept of analogy.<sup>220</sup>

With good reason it is believed that Philodemus produced his best work in *On Death*. The work is comprised of at least four books, the fourth of which is recovered from *P.Herc.* 1050. The handwriting in this roll, dating back to the third quarter of the first century BCE, leads us to believe that this treatise was the last composition by Philodemus to enter the Greek library of the Villa while the Gadaran was still alive. Two more volumes seem to contain parts of the work: *P.Herc.* 189, which is written in a slightly italic font that might lead us to think it a provisional draft of the text datable to the time of Philodemus; and *P.Herc.* 807, which could date back to sometime after the mid-first century BCE.<sup>221</sup>

The fundamental concept of the work is the ineluctibility of death, which, as a privation of sensation in which all good and evil lie, is not to be feared by the wise man. He knows that what matters is not living long, but rather pleasantly, and even if his existence were everlasting, the pleasure could not become any greater than it is in a short and finite time.<sup>222</sup>

We can date back to the first century BCE the writing of *P.Herc.* 1044, an anepigraphic roll containing the biography of the Epicurean Philonides of Laodicea, who lived in the second century BCE. The unknown author stresses several times his kindness and restraint, based on direct testimony (e.g. citations extracted from writings, letters, and documents of Philonides himself) and indirect (e.g. “notes, written annotations,” edited by a witness present during the events).<sup>223</sup>

## **Late Acquisitions: Texts by Epicurus, Metrodorus, Colotes, Polystratus, Demetrius Laco, and Philodemus (End of the First Century BCE–Beginning of the First Century CE)**

Based on paleographic examination it appears appropriate to assume that, between the end of the first century BCE and the beginning of the first century CE, the Greek library of the Villa incorporated a series of texts by

Epicurus, Metrodorus, Colotes, Polystratus, Demetrius Laco, and Philodemus himself, as well as some Stoic texts.<sup>224</sup> The writings by Philodemus from this last phase are as follows: the book from the work *On Epicurus*, preserved in *P.Herc.* 1232; late transcripts of *Works on the Records of Epicurus and Some Others* (*P.Herc.* 310); the two books of *Ordering of the Philosophers* dedicated to the Academics (*P.Herc.* 164) and Stoics (*P.Herc.* 1018); and a partial revision of the work *On Piety*.<sup>225</sup>

## When and Why Did the Greek Library of the Villa Stop Expanding?

Cavallo contends that there are no Herculaneum rolls (among those already open, of course) that can be dated to the “very late” first century CE.<sup>226</sup> According to him, this shows that “interest for Epicureanism in Campania (and in the Roman world?) had waned.” But, as has been said,<sup>227</sup> according to Del Mastro, the revision of some works of philosophical historiography, along with the restoration of Philodemus’s works by specialized *glutinatores* working after his death, attest to the fact that “still in the first decades of the Christian era, and perhaps later, many Philodemean treatises and works of philosophical historiography were restored, copied, and read.”<sup>228</sup> On his view, these things together with the findings from the recent excavation of the first lower level of the Villa—where an area with a decoration from 79 CE in the process of being restored was uncovered—justify the belief that in the Villa “an intense and lively cultural activity was still on display, even at the time of the eruption and in the decades leading up to it.”

In my opinion, at the present state of our knowledge, we do not possess incontrovertible evidence that in the late first century CE at least the Epicurean section of the library was still active. After the death of Caesoninus, the building might have passed to his son, Pontifex, and later to others, who might not have harbored the same sentiments towards the philosophy of the Garden as did the previous owners, even though we do know that the philosophy was still followed with interest in Campania as well as in the general Roman context during the first century CE.<sup>229</sup> The

owners of the Villa in the second half of the first century CE were in the fateful year of 79 CE concerned with restoring parts of the building, but that does not necessarily imply that they were also concerned with restoring the rolls of the Greek library.

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<sup>1</sup> See Angeli, “La Villa dei Papiri e gli scavi *sub divo* fra archeologia, filologia e papirologia,” 57.

<sup>2</sup> See Schaller, “Gadara,” 654; Dorandi, “La patria di Filodemo,” 254–56; Leisten, “Gadara,” 729–30.

<sup>3</sup> An overview of the life and the works of Philodemus in Longo Auricchio, Indelli, and Del Mastro, “Philodème de Gadara,” 34–59; Blank, “Philodemus.”

<sup>4</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 87.

<sup>5</sup> See Philod. *Ind. Acad.*, Dorandi col. 34, 2–6. For a complete and updated bibliography on the papyri from Herculaneum see Gigante, *Catalogo dei Papiri Ercolanesi*; Capasso, “Primo Supplemento al Catalogo dei Papiri Ercolanesi”; Del Mastro, “Secondo Supplemento al Catalogo dei Papiri Ercolanesi”; *Chartes. Catalogo dei Papiri Ercolanesi online*.

<sup>6</sup> It is possible that Philodemus had been to Himera in Sicily as well. Cf. Sider, *The Epigrams of Philodemus*, 9–10, 231.

<sup>7</sup> See Puglia, “Filodemo da Alessandria ad Atene,” 131–42.

<sup>8</sup> See Capasso, “L’Egitto nei papiri ercolanesi,” 51–64; J. Delattre and D. Delattre, “Le recours aux *mirabilia*,” 221–37.

<sup>9</sup> See Puglia, “Filodemo da Alessandria ad Atene,” 37–142; Angeli, “La Villa dei Papiri e gli scavi *sub divo* fra archeologia, filologia e papirologia,” 53–54.

<sup>10</sup> Kaibel XXIV = Gow-Page XIX = Gigante XVI.

<sup>11</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 65, 68.

<sup>12</sup> See Angeli and Colaizzo, “I frammenti di Zenone Sidonio,” 49.

<sup>13</sup> Angeli and Colaizzo, “I frammenti di Zenone Sidonio,” fr. 3.



- <sup>14</sup> Angeli and Colaizzo, “I frammenti di Zenone Sidonio,” fr. 8.
- <sup>15</sup> Angeli and Colaizzo, “I frammenti di Zenone Sidonio,” fr. 5.
- <sup>16</sup> Angeli and Colaizzo, “I frammenti di Zenone Sidonio,” fr. 6.
- <sup>17</sup> See Del Mastro, “Filodemo e la lode di Zenone Sidonio,” 89–109.
- <sup>18</sup> Angeli and Colaizzo, “I frammenti di Zenone Sidonio,” fr. 16, on which see the related comment at pp. 102–103.
- <sup>19</sup> Angeli and Colaizzo, “I frammenti di Zenone Sidonio,” fr. 23.
- <sup>20</sup> See Kleve and Del Mastro, “Il PHerc. 1533: Zenone Sidonio A *Cratere*,” 149–56; Capasso, “Per l’itinerario della papirologia ercolanese: I,” 69.
- <sup>21</sup> See Dorandi, “Lucrece et les Épicuriens de Campanie,” 35–48.
- <sup>22</sup> On Phaedrus see Sbordone, “Primi lineamenti d’un ritratto di Fedro epicureo,” 21–30.
- <sup>23</sup> See Dorandi, Indelli, and Tepedino Guerra, “Per la cronologia degli scolarchi epicurei,” 141–42.
- <sup>24</sup> See Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique, Livre IV*, XVII.
- <sup>25</sup> See Sedley, “Philosophical Allegiance in the Greco-Roman World,” 97–119, esp. 103–17.
- <sup>26</sup> See Tepedino Guerra, “Filosofia e società a Roma,” 126–29.
- <sup>27</sup> Dorandi, “Lucrece et les Épicuriens de Campanie,” 35–48.
- <sup>28</sup> Dorandi, “Lucrece et les Épicuriens de Campanie,” 48.
- <sup>29</sup> See Erler, “Orthodoxie und Anpassung,” 171–200.
- <sup>30</sup> Tepedino Guerra, “Filosofia e società a Roma,” 126–29.
- <sup>31</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo nella storia della letteratura greca*, 49.
- <sup>32</sup> Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, 142.
- <sup>33</sup> I am here referring, of course, to the rolls that contain definitive editions of the texts of the Gadaran.
- <sup>34</sup> On this problem, see the formulation by Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique, Livre IV*, XXXVIII.
- <sup>35</sup> On this passage, see Dorandi, *Filodemo*, Il buon re secondo Omero, 42, 109, 132, 208; Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 81–83.
- <sup>36</sup> Sudhaus, “Philodemeum,” 475–76.
- <sup>37</sup> Dorandi, *Filodemo*, Il buon re secondo Omero, 42.
- <sup>38</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 82–3.
- <sup>39</sup> Kaibel XXII = Gow-Page XXIII = Gigante XVIII = Seider XXVII.
- <sup>40</sup> On this epigram, see Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 103–106; Sider, *The Epigrams of Philodemus*, 152–60.
- <sup>41</sup> See Bloch, “L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus in Samothrace and Herculaneum,” 485–93, esp. 490–92; Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 64–65.
- <sup>42</sup> I am here referring to Mommsen, “Inchriftenbüsten,” 32–36; and Allen and De Lacy, “The Patrons of Philodemus,” 59–65.
- <sup>43</sup> I 222 s. Sudhaus: ἀποθεωρωμένων τοιγαροῦν ὧ Γάιῃ παῖ, πάντων ...
- <sup>44</sup> Allen and De Lacy, “The Patrons of Philodemus,” 64.
- <sup>45</sup> See Gigante, *Ricerche Filodemee*, 35–53.
- <sup>46</sup> Dorandi, “Gaio bambino,” 41–42 reads: ὧ Γάιῃ Πάν ὅς α, πάντων, but the letter *supra lineam* is a *nu* and not a *sigma*, so it should be written: Πά ὅς α.
- <sup>47</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 103–104.

- <sup>48</sup> Philippson, "Philodemos," 2445, 2449 (repr. 230, 232).
- <sup>49</sup> Cichorius, *Römische Studien*, 295–97.
- <sup>50</sup> See Capasso, *Manuale di Papirologia Ercolanese*, 151–98.
- <sup>51</sup> See Gigante and Capasso, "Il ritorno di Virgilio a Ercolano," 3–6; Capasso, *Les papyrus latins d'Herculanum*, 45–58.
- <sup>52</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 69–79.
- <sup>53</sup> Kaibel XXIII = Gow-Page XX = Gigante XXXXIII = Sider XXIX.
- <sup>54</sup> English translation by editor.
- <sup>55</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 70.
- <sup>56</sup> See Mustilli, "La villa pseudourbana," 10–11.
- <sup>57</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 71.
- <sup>58</sup> Sider, *The Epigrams of Philodemus*, 167–68.
- <sup>59</sup> As attested by Strab. 5.4.8; Sen. *QN* 6.1; Sisenna fr. 53 Peter.
- <sup>60</sup> Longo Auricchio, "La biblioteca ercolanese," 202.
- <sup>61</sup> Angeli, "La Villa dei Papiri e gli scavi *sub divo* fra archeologia, filologia e papirologia," 58–61.
- <sup>62</sup> According to Sider, *The Epigrams of Philodemus*, 164, 168, the last two verses should be delivered by Sosylos, but the hypothesis is unfounded.
- <sup>63</sup> On the architecture of the Villa, see Mustilli, "La villa pseudourbana," 7–18; De Simone, "La Villa dei Papiri," 15–36; Capasso, *Manuale di Papirologia Ercolanese*, 27–39; De Simone et al., "Ercolano 1992–1997," 10–13; De Simone and Ruffo, "Ercolano 1996–1998. Lo scavo della Villa dei Papiri," 325–44; Guidobaldi and Esposito, "Le nuove ricerche archeologiche nella Villa dei Papiri di Ercolano," 331–70; Guidobaldi and Esposito, "New Archeological Research at the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum," 21–62.
- <sup>64</sup> If the epigram is set in Italy; but we must recognize that this is not entirely certain.
- <sup>65</sup> Gow-Page XXII = Gigante XIX = Sider XXVIII. The translation is by Sider.
- <sup>66</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 76–9.
- <sup>67</sup> Cichorius, *Römische Studien*, 297.
- <sup>68</sup> Plut. *Caes.* 65; App. *BC* 2.116.
- <sup>69</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 78.
- <sup>70</sup> Sider, *The Epigrams of Philodemus*, 162.
- <sup>71</sup> See Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 77.
- <sup>72</sup> A weak hypothesis, for example, is that advanced by Cichorius, *Römische Studien*, 295 with regard to *AP* X 21 (= VIII Kaibel, XV Gow-Page, III Gigante, VIII Sider). This is an epigram in which Philodemus addresses a prayer to Aphrodite, asking her, among other things (ll. 3–4): "Kypris, (rescue) the one halfway dragged from the saffron bridal bed, me, the one snowed upon by Celtic snowstorms." Cichorius hypothesized a trip by Philodemus to Gallia during a winter in the 50s. He was following Piso, who traveled to get his son-in-law Caesar. But see also Philippson, "Philodemos," 2445–46 (repr. 230), who, on the basis of the same verses, in the footsteps of Kaibel, believed that the Gadaran had at some point been married. With regard to this, see Gigante, "Filodemo tra poesia e prosa," 131–32; and Sider, *The Epigrams of Philodemus*, 91–94.
- <sup>73</sup> Which epigrams listed in the papyrus refer to Philodemus and what possible autobiographical value they may have has been much discussed. See at least Luppe, "POxy 54," 125–26; Sider, *The Epigrams of Philodemus*, 205–25; Gigante, "Filodemo tra poesia e prosa," 129–51; Puglia, "Considerazioni bibliologiche e testuali sulla raccolta di epigrammi di POxy 3724," 357–80. That the activity of the epigrammatic poet is not in conflict with his Epicurean philosophical doctrine is shown by Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique, Livre IV, XXIV–XXV*.

<sup>74</sup> On Siro see Gigante, “I frammenti di Sirone,” 175–98.

<sup>75</sup> On this passage of *De signis*, see at least Capasso, “L’Egitto nei papiri ercolanesi,” 58–63; Delattre and Delattre, “Le recours aux *mirabilia*,” 221–37; Carruesco, “*Le Nain d’Alexandrie* (Philodème, *De signis*, col. 2, 4 ss.),” 133–36; Longo Auricchio, “I nani di Antonio. Valore di una testimonianza,” 209–13.

<sup>76</sup> This last overall measurement takes into account only the atrium floor and the two peristyles, and not any of the lower floors. See Guidobaldi and Esposito, “Le nuove ricerche archeologiche nella Villa dei Papiri di Ercolano,” 370 n. 129.

<sup>77</sup> See at least Wojcik, *La Villa dei Papiri ad Ercolano*, 36, 272. On the hypothesis that the rectangular peristyle was subsequently added to, see also Scatozza Höricht, *Nota bibliografica*, 137; De Franciscis, “Considerazioni sulla Villa Ercolanese dei Pisoni,” 621–35.

<sup>78</sup> See De Simone and Ruffo, “Ercolano 1996–1998. Lo scavo della Villa dei Papiri,” 341–42 and “Ercolano e la Villa dei Papiri alla luce dei nuovi scavi,” 307. Later, however, the same scholars, “I mosaici della Villa dei Papiri ad Ercolano (NA). Il quartiere dell’atrio,” 175, 177 speak of “an essentially unitary conception of the complex, to be placed in the second half of the 1st c. B.C., around 50–30 B.C.” and eventually they propose 40–30 BCE.

<sup>79</sup> See Guidobaldi and Esposito, “Le nuove ricerche archeologiche nella Villa dei Papiri di Ercolano,” 367–68.

<sup>80</sup> See the next section.

<sup>81</sup> In Comparetti, “La Villa de’ Pisoni in Ercolano e la sua biblioteca,” 159–76.

<sup>82</sup> Comparetti, “Relazione sui papiri ercolanesi,” 55–85.

<sup>83</sup> See Cic. *De provinciis consul.* 6–7; *Pro Sest.* 94; *In Pis.* 96.

<sup>84</sup> In Comparetti, “La bibliothèque de Philodème,” 118–29.

<sup>85</sup> See Mommsen, “Inschriftenbüsten,” 32–6. The reaction by Comparetti was rather resentful. See Comparetti and De Petra, *La Villa Ercolanese dei Pisoni*, 28; Cerasuolo, “Giuseppe Fiorelli e Domenico Comparetti,” 53–60.

<sup>86</sup> See Capasso, “Gli studi ercolanesi di Hermann Usener nel suo carteggio inedito con Hermann Diels,” 116–17.

<sup>87</sup> In reality, as Bassi and Comparetti thought, Poseidonax was likely the scribe of the roll who, for purposes of remuneration, indicated his name and the number of columns copied. See Bassi, “La sticometria nei papiri ercolanesi,” 483–84; Comparetti, “La bibliothèque de Philodème,” 125; Capasso, *Manuale di Papirologia Ercolanese*, 45.

<sup>88</sup> Bloch, “L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus in Samothrace and Herculaneum,” 485–93.

<sup>89</sup> Nisbet, *Cicero*, In *L. Calpurnium Pisonem oratio*, 186–88.

<sup>90</sup> Bloch, “Review of Cicero, In *L. Calpurnium Pisonem oratio*, by R. G. M. Nisbet,” esp. 561.

<sup>91</sup> See *infra* 420.

<sup>92</sup> Pandermalis, “Zum Programm der Statuenausstattung in der Villa dei Papiri,” 19–50.

<sup>93</sup> Lippold, *Kopien und Umbildungen griechischer Statuen*, 77. According to Lorenz, *Galerien von griechischen Philosophen-und Dichterbildnissen bei den Römern*, 10 ff., a relationship does not exist between the books of the library of the Villa and the sculptural decoration, which seems to have been enriched until the final period.

<sup>94</sup> The view now seems accepted among scholars that the Epicureans, above all in the Roman context, permitted political engagement. See Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*; Fish, “Not All Politicians Are Sisyphus,” 71–104; Armstrong, “Epicurean Virtues, Epicurean Friendship,” 105–28.

<sup>95</sup> Adamo Muscettola, “Il ritratto di Lucio Calpurnio Pisone Pontefice da Ercolano,” 145–55.

<sup>96</sup> On this matter, see at least Capasso, *Manuale di Papirologia Ercolanese*, 65–83.

- <sup>97</sup> On the statue of Athena in the Villa, see at least Wojcik, *La Villa dei Papiri ad Ercolano*, 139–41, 150–51; Mattusch, *The Villa dei Papyri at Herculaneum*, 147–51.
- <sup>98</sup> Sauron, “Templa serena,” 69–82.
- <sup>99</sup> Sauron, “Templa serena,” 73.
- <sup>100</sup> See Wojcik, “La ‘Villa dei Papiri’ di Ercolano,” 359–68; see also Wojcik, “La ‘Villa dei Papiri’. Alcune riflessioni,” 129–34.
- <sup>101</sup> This is discussed by Wojcik, *La Villa dei Papiri ad Ercolano*.
- <sup>102</sup> Wojcik, *La Villa dei Papiri ad Ercolano*, 260.
- <sup>103</sup> On the relocation of the papyri in the Villa and the circumstances of their recovery, see Capasso, *Manuale di Papirologia Ercolanese*, 67–83; *Les papyrus latins d’Herculaneum*, 13–22; and “Custodia e lettura dei testi nella Villa Ercolanese dei Papiri: alcune riflessioni”.
- <sup>104</sup> See Gallavotti, “La libreria di una villa romana ercolanese (nella Casa dei papiri),” 129–45.
- <sup>105</sup> Costabile, “Opere di oratoria politica e giudiziaria nella biblioteca della Villa dei Papiri,” 591–606, esp. 599–603. On the thesis of Costabile, see Capasso, *Manuale di Papirologia Ercolanese*, 54–56.
- <sup>106</sup> See Cic. *De or.* 2.316 and *Brutus* 173.
- <sup>107</sup> Scatozza Höricht and Longo Auricchio, “Dopo il Comparetti-De Petra,” 157–61 and 161–67.
- <sup>108</sup> The candidacy of the Balbi was already proposed in 1984 by Guadagno in an essay in which doubts were raised about the attribution to the Claudii Pulchri and to the Mammii. See Guadagno, “Note prosopografiche ercolanesi,” 155 n. 63.
- <sup>109</sup> Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 61–64.
- <sup>110</sup> Gigante, in the volume *La bibliothèque de Philodème et l’épicurisme romain*, Paris 1987, which appeared in Italian in 1990 with the title *Filodemo in Italia* (of which see especially pp. 1–101) and in English in 1995 with the title *Philodemus in Italy*.
- <sup>111</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 61.
- <sup>112</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 60–62.
- <sup>113</sup> Warden and Romano, “The Course of Glory,” 228–54.
- <sup>114</sup> Mattusch, *The Villa dei Papyri at Herculaneum*.
- <sup>115</sup> Mattusch, *The Villa dei Papyri at Herculaneum*, 294.
- <sup>116</sup> Mattusch, *The Villa dei Papyri at Herculaneum*, 272.
- <sup>117</sup> Mattusch, *The Villa dei Papyri at Herculaneum*, 275.
- <sup>118</sup> According to Zanker, *Klassizistische Statuen*, 198 ff., the sculptural complex of the Villa, dominated by Augustan themes, dates back to the second half of the first century BCE.
- <sup>119</sup> Dillon, *Ancient Greek Portrait Sculpture*, 42–9.
- <sup>120</sup> The first time was in Pagano, *Ercolano. Itinerario archeologico ragionato*, 97 and the second in Pagano, *Gli scavi di Ercolano*, 113.
- <sup>121</sup> In Pagano, “Herculaneum. Eine Kleinstadt am Golf von Neapel,” 8. See also Pagano, “Le Ville marittime romane,” 70–71.
- <sup>122</sup> Guidobaldi, “Abitare a Ercolano,” 269–70.
- <sup>123</sup> Cic. *Ad fam.* 13.1; see also *Ad Q. fr.* 1.2.4; *Ad Att.* 5.11.6; 5.1.3.
- <sup>124</sup> Angeli, “La Villa dei Papiri e gli scavi *sub divo* fra archeologia filologia e papirologia,” esp. 57–68.
- <sup>125</sup> See Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 65.
- <sup>126</sup> This was maintained by Adamo Muscettola, “Il ritratto di Lucio Calpurnio Pisone Pontefice da Ercolano,” 153–55. On the Villa see also Moesch, “La Villa dei Papiri,” 9–25; on the problem of its

ownership see also Capasso, “Who Lived in the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum. A Settled Question?,” 89–113.

<sup>127</sup> See Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 58–67.

<sup>128</sup> For an analysis of the contents of the Greek library at Herculaneum, see Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 19–62; Dorandi, *Filodemo in Italia*, 2328–68; Capasso, *Manuale di Papirologia Ercolanese*, 151–98; Delattre, *La Villa des Papyrus et les rouleaux d’Herculanum*, 71–105; Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique*, Livre IV, XI–LXII; Longo Auricchio, “La biblioteca ercolanese,” 190–209; Cavalieri, “La biblioteca ercolanese: i contenuti,” 57–71.

<sup>129</sup> On this matter, see Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 60–61.

<sup>130</sup> See Cavallo, “I rotoli di Ercolano come prodotti scritti. Quattro riflessioni,” 5–11, esp. 11.

<sup>131</sup> See *supra*, §15.1.

<sup>132</sup> See Romeo, Demetrio Lacone, *La poesia*, 31–32.

<sup>133</sup> Houston, “The non-Philodemus book collection in the Villa of Papyri,” 188–89; Houston, *Inside Roman Libraries*, 121–29.

<sup>134</sup> Del Mastro, “Papiri ercolanesi vergati da più mani,” esp. 64–65.

<sup>135</sup> Dorandi, “Pratiche di redazione e di produzione libraria nella biblioteca di Filodemo a Ercolano,” 71–72; Dorandi, “La nuova cronologia della ‘Villa dei Papiri’ a Ercolano e le sorti della biblioteca di Filodemo,” 181–203.

<sup>136</sup> Cavallo, “I papiri di Ercolano come documenti per la storia delle biblioteche e dei libri antichi,” 591.

<sup>137</sup> Cavallo, “I papiri di Ercolano come documenti per la storia delle biblioteche e dei libri antichi,” 585.

<sup>138</sup> With excessive scepticism Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique*, Livre IV, XXXI–XXXII argues that a chronological classification of the works of Philodemus based on the dating of writings of various rolls is “very problematic.” For in his view, “the writing of a roll remains insufficient to date the work it contained; one can only say that the work was already composed when the roll was made, and nothing more.”

<sup>139</sup> See Dorandi, *Filodemo*, Storia dei filosofi, La Stoà da Zenone a Panezio (*PHerc.* 1018); Cavalieri, “Filodemo, *Rassegna degli Stoici*.”

<sup>140</sup> See Dorandi, *Filodemo*, Storia dei filosofi [.] *Platone e l’Academia* (*PHerc.* 1021 e 164). As we will see, *P.Herc.* 164 and *P.Herc.* 1018 were added to the library in its final stage of development, between the end of the first century BCE and the beginning of the first century CE.

<sup>141</sup> See Giuliano, “*PHerc.* 495–*PHerc.* 558 (Filodemo, *Storia di Socrate e della sua scuola?*),” 37–79.

<sup>142</sup> See Tepedino Guerra, “Il κῆρυξ epicureo nel *PHerc.* 1780,” 17–24.

<sup>143</sup> See Cavalieri, “La *Rassegna dei filosofi* di Filodemo,” 17–53.

<sup>144</sup> *P.Herc.* 1232 became part of the library after the time of Philodemus. On the paleography of the two papyri, see Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 32, 50. On *Περὶ Ἐπικούρου*, see at least Clay, “The Cults of Epicurus,” 11–28.

<sup>145</sup> On the two papyri, see Militello, *Filodemo*, Memorie epicuree (*PHerc.* 1418 e 310). On other papyri in Herculaneum that in ways resemble the same work for paleographic reasons or on account of their content, see Militello, *Filodemo*, Memorie epicuree (*PHerc.* 1418 e 310), 81–4. For an analysis of the recent work on the biographical activity of Philodemus, see Longo Auricchio, “Gli studi sui testi biografici ercolanesi negli ultimi dieci anni,” 219–55.

<sup>146</sup> Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique*, Livre IV, LII dubiously attributes to this work *P.Herc.* 176, which was written, however, in a handwriting datable to the second century BCE. On the epistolary communication within the Kepos, see Campos Daroca and de la Paz López Martínez,



“Communauté épicurienne et communication épistolaire,” 21–38; Tepedino Guerra, “Le lettere private del *Kῆπος*,” 37–39.

<sup>147</sup> An edition of the text can be found in Dorandi, “Filodemo, *Gli Stoici* (PHerc. 155 e 339),” 91–133; see Sabater Beltrá, “La polémique dans la philosophie hellénistique et romaine,” 115–29.

<sup>148</sup> For an analysis of Philodemus’s ethical works, see Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*.

<sup>149</sup> For an interpretation of the work, see above all Gigante, *Ricerche Filodemee*, 55–113. The latest but not always impeccable edition of the text can be found in Indelli and Tsouna-McKirahan, [*Philodemus*], [*On Choices and Avoidances*]. For the most recent studies on the work, see De Sanctis, “Terminologia tecnica e *hapax legomena*,” 199–219; Delattre, “Le *Franc-parler* de Philodème (PHerc. 1471),” 271–91; Giovacchini, “La nouvelle reconstruction du rouleau du *Franc-parler* de Philodème,” 293–314.

<sup>150</sup> See Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique, Livre IV*, XXXVI.

<sup>151</sup> However, see at least Bignone, “Philodemea (Pap. Herc. ined. 168 col. 1,2; Pap. Herc. 57 col. 1,2,4,5,9),” 421–22.

<sup>152</sup> An edition can be found in Indelli, *Filodemo*, L’ira. See also Indelli, “The Vocabulary of Anger in Philodemus’ *De ira* and Vergil’s *Aeneid*,” 103–10.

<sup>153</sup> On the *scorzatura*, cf. Capasso, *A. De Iorio*, Officina de’Papiri, 26–35.

<sup>154</sup> Delattre, “Philodème, *De la musique*,” 49–143. An edition of the book can be found in Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique, Livre IV*.

<sup>155</sup> This work still lacks a complete modern edition that would replace the one published in Leipzig by S. Sudhaus (1892–1896). Books 1 and 2 were published by Longo Auricchio, *Φιλοδήμου Περὶ ῥητορικῆς* libros primum et secundum; what is likely Book 3 was published by Hammerstaedt, “Der Schlussteil von Philodems drittem Buch über Rhetorik,” 9–117.

<sup>156</sup> I do not dwell on other minor papyri belonging to the work.

<sup>157</sup> For a reconstruction of the original structure of *Περὶ ῥητορικῆς*, see Longo Auricchio, “Nuovi elementi per la ricostruzione della *Retorica* di Filodemo,” 169–71, who corrects the preceding effort by Dorandi, “Per una ricomposizione dello scritto di Filodemo sulla *Retorica*,” 59–87.

<sup>158</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 36–45.

<sup>159</sup> See at least Janko, *Philodemus, On Poems, Book 1*, 12–13.

<sup>160</sup> Recent editions of Book 5 can be found in Mangoni, *Filodemo, Il quinto libro della Poetica*; of Book 1 in Janko, *Philodemus, On Poems, Book 1*; of Books 3 and 4 in Janko, *Philodemus, On Poems, Books 3–4, with the Fragments of Aristotle, On Poets*.

<sup>161</sup> Janko, *Philodemus, On Poems, Books 3–4, with the Fragments of Aristotle, On Poets*, 223.

<sup>162</sup> *Poem*. 5 col. 36, 10–13 Mangoni.

<sup>163</sup> See Cavallo, *Libri scritte scribe a Ercolano*, 42–43, 46, 55–56.

<sup>164</sup> An edition of the text can be found in Dorandi, *Filodemo*, Il buon re secondo Omero. See also Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 81–101; for other points of contact with Vergil’s *Aeneid*, see in particular Fish, “Anger, Philodemus’ Good King, and the Helen Episode of *Aeneid* 2.567–589,” 111–38.

<sup>165</sup> Del Mastro, “Per la ricostruzione del primo libro del trattato di Filodemo,” 85–96.

<sup>166</sup> Puglia, “Il misterioso titolo del *Πρὸς τοὺς* di Filodemo (P.Herc. 1005/862, 1485),” 119–24.

<sup>167</sup> An edition of the text can be found in Angeli, *Filodemo*, Agli amici di scuola (PHerc. 1005).

<sup>168</sup> See Capasso, “Un libro filodemeo in due esemplari,” 139–48. See also Janko, *Philodemus, On Poems, Books 3–4, with the Fragments of Aristotle, On Poets*, 30.

<sup>169</sup> The ethical problems appear by far to be those dearest to the heart of the Gadaran. See Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique, Livre IV*, XXXVIII.

<sup>170</sup> Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 48.

- <sup>171</sup> See Capasso, “Les livres sur la flatterie dans le *De vitiis* de Philodème,” 182.
- <sup>172</sup> On this matter, see Capasso, “Les livres sur la flatterie dans le *De vitiis* de Philodème,” 180 and n. 5.
- <sup>173</sup> Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 64. See also 41–42, 46, 54–55 in the same work.
- <sup>174</sup> See Capasso, “Per una ricostruzione del *De vitiis* di Filodemo,” 97–104.
- <sup>175</sup> The edition can be found in Gargiulo, “PHerc. 222: Filodemo sull’adulazione,” 103–27.
- <sup>176</sup> See Gargiulo, “PHerc. 222: Filodemo sull’adulazione,” 104–105. In this context see also Glad, *Paul and Philodemus*, 108–10.
- <sup>177</sup> The edition can be found in Acosta Méndez, “PHerc. 1089: Filodemo “Sobre la adulación,” 121–38.
- <sup>178</sup> See Longo Auricchio and Tepedino Guerra, “Chi è Timasagora?,” 405–13.
- <sup>179</sup> The incomplete and hardly impeccable edition can be found in De Falco, “Appunti sul *Περὶ κολακείας* di Filodemo,” 19–26.
- <sup>180</sup> See Capasso, “Les livres sur la flatterie dans le *De vitiis* de Philodème,” 190–94.
- <sup>181</sup> See Capasso, “Un intellettuale e il suo re,” 47–52.
- <sup>182</sup> The edition, surely to be revised, can be found in Bassi, *Herculaneusium Voluminum quae supersunt Collectio Tertia*. See also Kondo, “I Caratteri di Teofrasto nei Papiri Ercolanesi,” 73–87 and “Per l’interpretazione del pensiero filodemeo sulla adulazione nel PHerc. 1457,” 43–56.
- <sup>183</sup> Dorandi and Stein, “Der älteste Textzeuge für den *ἄρσος* des Theophrast,” 1–16.
- <sup>184</sup> It can be read in the edition *Herculaneusium Voluminum quae supersunt*, 84–92. *P.Herc.* 1092 is also very fragmentary; we can read some references to the behavior of flatterers; see Capasso, “Nuovi frammenti del *De adulatione* di Filodemo (P.Herc. 1092),” 91–101.
- <sup>185</sup> See Gigante and Capasso, “Il ritorno di Virgilio a Ercolano,” 3–6. On this fragment, see also Delattre, “Du nouveau sur le *P.Herc. Paris. 2*,” 175–88.
- <sup>186</sup> See Gigante, “Virgilio e i suoi amici tra Napoli e Ercolano,” 87–125 (repr. 57–98).
- <sup>187</sup> See Rostagni, *Virgilio minore*, 391–404.
- <sup>188</sup> I do not find Gigante’s hypothesis convincing. See Capasso, *Les papyrus latins d’Herculaneum*, 45–58.
- <sup>189</sup> On this matter, see Tepedino Guerra, “Metrodoro *ἀγαθὸς οἰκονόμος*,” 67–76.
- <sup>190</sup> For a complete edition of the book, see Jensen, *Philodemi περὶ οἰκονομίας qui dicitur libellus*. Timely exegeses of the whole text can be found in Laurenti, *Filodemo e il pensiero economico degli epicurei*.
- <sup>191</sup> See Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 35, 52. The remains of another book of the work were identified in *P.Herc.* 209 by Del Mastro, “Osservazioni sulle *subscriptions* dei *P.Herc.* 163 e 209,” 323–28.
- <sup>192</sup> See Tepedino Guerra, “Il primo libro ‘Sulla ricchezza’ di Filodemo,” 52–95. For discussion of *Περὶ πλούτου*, see at least Scognamiglio, “Il *P.Herc.* 163 (Filodemo, *La ricchezza*, I libro),” 85–92 and “Rilettura delle coll.49 e 54 del primo libro del trattato *La ricchezza*,” 181–96.
- <sup>193</sup> The papyrus can still be read in an old edition by Jensen, *Philodemi περὶ κακῶν liber decimus*. A translation and commentary of some columns can be found in Gigante, “I sette tipi dell’archetipo “il superbo” in Aristone di Ceo,” 345–56.
- <sup>194</sup> See Capasso, *Comunità senza rivolta. Quattro saggi sull’epicureismo*, 94–97.
- <sup>195</sup> See Angeli, “Aristone, *Epistola sull’alleggerirsi della superbia*,” 9–39.
- <sup>196</sup> See Ioppolo, “Il *Περὶ τοῦ κουφίζειν ὑπερηφανίας*: una polemica antiscettica in Filodemo,” 715–34.



- <sup>197</sup> See at least Ranocchia, *Aristone*, Sul modo di liberare dalla superbia.
- <sup>198</sup> See also Angeli, “Aristone, *Il carattere dell’ αὐθάκαστος*, 105–120.
- <sup>199</sup> See Comparetti, “Relazione sui papiri ercolanesi,” 78 and n. 4.
- <sup>200</sup> See Dorandi and Spinelli, “Ancora su P.Herc. 1077, fr. B,” 12 and “Un libro di Filodemo sull’avarizia?,” 53–59.
- <sup>201</sup> Dorandi and Spinelli, “Un libro di Filodemo sull’avarizia?,” 3.
- <sup>202</sup> See Capasso, “I titoli nei papiri ercolanesi. IV,” 59–65.
- <sup>203</sup> Bassi, “Φιλοδήμου Περὶ ὕβρεως?,” 16 attributed *P.Herc.* 1017 to a book of Περὶ ὕβρεως, *On Haughtiness*. According to Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 42, this was written by a hand somewhat akin to the hand that worked on the books certainly belonging to *De vitiis*. Nonetheless Karamanolis, “Philodemus, Περὶ ὕβρεως? (PHerc. 1017),” 103–10, who published a set of new interpretations of the text that differed from those by Bassi, believed that even if from thematic and linguistic standpoints the attribution to Philodemus could be accepted, it is difficult to hold that the book was dedicated to ὕβρις, which on his view is not a vice, but the expression of a certain vice or lack of virtue. Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique, Livre IV, XXXVI* contends that the text constitutes a book of the aforementioned Περὶ παθῶν. *P.Herc.* 1678, attributed to *De vitiis* by Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemos*, 176 as part of Περὶ ἐπιχαίρεκακίας, *On Malicious Joy*, and written (according to Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 42) by a hand akin to other rolls of *De vitiis*, was more likely dedicated to jealousy and should rather be ascribed to a treatise Περὶ παθῶν, *On Passions*. See Tepedino Guerra, “Il PHerc. 1678: Filodemo sull’invidia,” 113–25; Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique, Livre IV, XXXVI*. Crönert himself (*Kolotes und Menedemos*, 91 n. 447, 176) attributed to *De vitiis* also *P.Herc.* 1025 as book Περὶ φιλοξοδίας, *On Love of Glory*; yet it contains a text on ethics with some references to Theophrastus’s *Characters*. See Tepedino Guerra, “Il PHerc. 1025,” 569–74. Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique, Livre IV, XXXV*, however, still believes that the papyrus contains a book on *On Love of Glory*, belonging to *De vitiis*.
- <sup>204</sup> See Del Mastro, “P.Herc. 1399: il primo libro del περὶ ὀμιλίας di Filodemo,” 165–70.
- <sup>205</sup> See Ippolito, “Alcune considerazioni sul titolo finale del P.Herc. 873 (Filodemo, La conversazione),” 91–100. The papyrus was written after the mid-first century BCE. A largely inadequate edition of it was overseen by Amoroso, “Filodemo sulla conversazione,” 63–76; see Ippolito, *Filodemo, La conversazione libro II (P.Herc. 873)*.
- <sup>206</sup> For an edition of the papyrus, see Tepedino Guerra, “Filodemo sulla gratitudine,” 96–113. For a new reading and interpretation of the *subscriptio* of the papyrus, see Puglia, *La cura del libro nel mondo antico*, 108–10.
- <sup>207</sup> See Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique, Livre IV, XLVIII*.
- <sup>208</sup> For an edition of this difficult text, see Ferrario, “Filodemo “Sulla provvidenza? (PHerc. 1670),” 67–92. According to Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique, Livre IV, XLIII*, the text could be a book of *On the Gods*.
- <sup>209</sup> See Obbink, *Philodemus, On Piety, Part I*.
- <sup>210</sup> A complete edition of *De pietate* is still the edition by Gomperz, *Herkulanische Studien*, II. In recent decades, however, several partial contributions have appeared, mostly by W. Luppe.
- <sup>211</sup> *On the Gods* can still be read in an old edition by Diels (*Philodemos Über die Götter erstes Buch* and *Philodemos Über die Götter drittes Buch*, I). Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 51 characterizes the edition as “superb and brilliant,” but it in any case needs to be redone entirely. On this work see also Essler, “Die Arbeiten an Philodem De dis III (PHerc. 152/157),” 153–204 and “Space and Movement in Philodemus’ De dis 3,” 101–24.
- <sup>212</sup> For an edition of the text, see Capasso, *Trattato etico epicureo*.

- <sup>213</sup> See Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 39, 64.
- <sup>214</sup> See Indelli, “Domenico Comparetti (1835–1927),” 21–30.
- <sup>215</sup> See Comparetti, “Frammenti inediti dell’etica di Epicuro tratti da un papiro ercolanese,” 401–21 and “Frammenti dell’etica di Epicuro tratti da un papiro ercolanese,” 67–88.
- <sup>216</sup> See above all Gigante, *Filodemo in Italia*, 53.
- <sup>217</sup> Indelli and Tsouna, [*Philodemus*], [*On choices and avoidances*]. See also the long review of this edition published by Obbink, “The Mooring of Philosophy,” 259–81.
- <sup>218</sup> See Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 35–6, 52, 64. According to Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique*, Livre IV, XLII, the papyrus contained the third book of the work.
- <sup>219</sup> De Lacy and De Lacy, *Philodemus*, On Methods of Inference.
- <sup>220</sup> Angeli and Colaizzo, “I frammenti di Zenone Sidonio,” 62. The other four papyri from Herculaneum (*P.Herc.* 671, 1003, 1389, 861) concern logic: *P.Herc.* 1003 and 1389 are certainly by Philodemus; *P.Herc.* 671 can perhaps refer to the Gadaran; *P.Herc.* 861 is anepigraphic. See Angeli and Colaizzo, “I frammenti di Zenone Sidonio,” 86, 128; Capasso, “*P.Herc.* 671: un altro libro ‘De signis’?”, 125–28; Capasso, *Manuale di Papirologia Ercolanese*, 189 n. 199.
- <sup>221</sup> The work can be read in the edition by Henry, *Philodemus*, On Death.
- <sup>222</sup> On the procedures through which Philodemus composed and published his books see Dorandi, “Pratiche di redazione e di produzione libraria nella biblioteca di Filodemo a Ercolano,” 69–91.
- <sup>223</sup> See the last edition of the papyrus in Gallo, *Frammenti biografici da papiri*, 2.21–66.
- <sup>224</sup> See Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 65.
- <sup>225</sup> See *supra*. On other extremely fragmented texts attributed to Philodemus, as well as other works by him that have been mentioned but not survived, see Delattre, *Philodème de Gadara Sur la musique*, Livre IV, XLV–XLVI, XLVIII–LII. On the philosophy of the Kepos see Warren, *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*.
- <sup>226</sup> See Cavallo, *Libri scritture scribi a Ercolano*, 65. But see Cavallo, “I papiri di Ercolano come documenti per la storia delle biblioteche e dei libri antichi,” 591.
- <sup>227</sup> See *supra*.
- <sup>228</sup> Del Mastro, “Papiri ercolanesi vergati da più mani,” esp. 64–65.
- <sup>229</sup> See Capasso, *Manuale di Papirologia Ercolanese*, 198 and n. 246; Erler, “Epicureanism in the Roman Empire,” 48–51.

## CHAPTER 16

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# LUCRETIUS

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MONICA R. GALE

te sequor, o Graiae gentis decus, inque tuis nunc  
ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis

*DRN* 3.3–4

I follow you, Glory of the Grecian race, and in the traces left by you I now plant my  
own footsteps.<sup>1</sup>

In these lines, as elsewhere in the *De rerum natura*, Lucretius proclaims an unswerving loyalty to Epicurus, representing himself as the faithful disciple of a heroic, even godlike, master (1.62–79, 5.1–54, 6.1–34; cf. 3.1042–44). At the same time, he repeatedly stakes a claim to originality, as the first to explore “trackless places of the Muses” (1.926 = 4.1), and to expound Epicurean doctrine in Latin (5.336–37; cf. 1.136–45, 4.969–70). The relation between these two assertions has been the focus of considerable debate amongst scholars both of ancient philosophy and of Latin poetry, and offers a useful starting point for an examination of Lucretius’s role in the history of Epicureanism.

## LUCRETIUS AND EPICUREANISM

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The six books of the *DRN* offer, in effect, a beginner's guide to Epicurean physics. Lucretius makes it clear at the outset that his poem assumes no prior philosophical knowledge, and his addressee, Memmius, is characterized as potentially resistant, or even hostile, to the lesson he is about to receive (1.52–53, 80–82, 102–103). The subject-matter to be dealt with is set out in an introductory prospectus or “syllabus,” following the proem to each book: thus, at 1.54–57, the poet announces that he will “begin to expound the exalted nature of the heavens and the gods, and reveal the first-beginnings of things, from which nature creates all things, nourishes them, and makes them grow, and into which that same nature dissolves them again when they perish” (*DRN* 1.54–57):

nam tibi de summa caeli ratione deumque  
disserere incipiam et rerum primordia pandam,  
unde omnis natura creet res auctet alatque  
quove eadem rursum natura perempta resolvat.

These lines encapsulate several of the distinctive features of Lucretius's presentation of Epicureanism, which we shall go on to consider in more detail. Characteristic, first of all, is the implicit emphasis on the all-encompassing explanatory power of the physical system, which embraces everything from the atomic level (*rerum primordia*, “first-beginnings of things,” 55) to the cosmos as a whole (*summa caeli ratio*, “the exalted nature of the heavens,” 54). This totalizing ambition is made retrospectively explicit towards the end of the poem, at 6.527–34,<sup>2</sup> but is also built into the very structure of the poem, which moves systematically from microcosm (Books 1–2: atoms and their properties), to macrocosm (Books 3–4: body and soul; perception, thought, sexuality, and heredity) to the suprahuman level (Books 5–6: cosmology and meteorology).<sup>3</sup> At the same time, lines 56–57 exemplify for the first time in the poem what will be a second major structuring principle: the cycle of birth and death, growth and decay.<sup>4</sup> This cycle, too, is implicit in the poem's architecture: the work as a whole is framed between the hymnic celebration of springtime, birth, and growth in the opening prayer to Venus, and the final “triumph of death” in the account of the Plague of Athens with which it ends; and this overarching pattern is complemented by a perceptible movement within individual books—Book

1 above all—from an initial emphasis on life and growth to closural images of death and decay. Historically, this tendency has often been interpreted as an indication of pessimism or melancholy on the poet's part; but it can also be understood—as we shall see—as a powerful rhetorical tool deployed by Lucretius in the service of his protreptic goal.

A third noteworthy feature of the lines from the proem quoted above is the part attributed to *natura* or Nature, in contrast to the gods, whose true character Lucretius promises to reveal (though in the event the promise is not fulfilled—perhaps an indication that, as is often supposed, the work had not received its final revision before the poet's death). This opening hint that creation and destruction are the work of “nature” (and not the gods) is picked up at the very beginning of the argument proper, where Lucretius, notably, adds the adverb *divinitus*, “by divine agency,” to his translation of Epicurus's fundamental proposition “nothing comes into being from non-existence” (*Ep. Hdt.* 38; *DRN* 1.150). Divine non-intervention in the world is a constant theme of Lucretius's poem, particularly in Books 4–6, and the poet repeatedly draws attention to the theological consequences of the physical principles he outlines. Equally, the reference at 1.56–57 to nature's creation and dissolution of all macroscopic entities points forward to the theme of impermanence and mutability which will be prominent throughout, but especially in Book 3, where the notion that the birth and death of each individual are merely part of a universal and unending process of atomic recycling (see especially 3.847–61, 964–71) is central to Lucretius's attempt to combat the fear of death.

In these introductory lines, then, we can already see adumbrated an underlying concern with the ethical goal of philosophical study—and in particular with freedom from the anxieties occasioned by misguided beliefs about the gods and the posthumous fate of the soul—which, arguably, pervades the poem, surfacing explicitly from time to time.<sup>5</sup> This emphasis is, of course, licensed by Epicurus's subordination of physics to the ethical end of *ataraxia* (*KD* 11, *Ep. Pyth.* 85), but seems also to be determined in part by generic considerations. From Hesiod on, the technical or theoretical subject matter of didactic poetry typically functions as a vehicle for the communication of a broader, and generally ethically informed, world-view. In Hesiod's case, apparently practical instruction on—for example—the best times for plowing, sowing, and sailing is placed at the service of the poet's generalized moral instruction on the importance of justice, piety, and

hard work. Similarly, scholars have increasingly come to recognize that the separation imposed by earlier editors between the physical and religious teachings of Empedocles—an important poetic model for Lucretius—is artificial and anachronistic: the two aspects of Empedoclean doctrine are inseparably related to each other, as—in effect—two sides of the same coin.<sup>6</sup>

Lucretius is similarly careful to emphasize, both explicitly and implicitly, the close connections between the physical and ethical aspects of Epicureanism. Thus, the poet draws out at several key points in the poem the theological corollaries of the physical theory, and underlines the harmful effects of false belief on individual and society. A series of passages in Book 2, for example, draws attention to ways in which atomic physics renders the concept of divine providence superfluous and indeed highly problematic: the growth of crops and animal nutrition can be accounted for without the need to invoke beneficent deities (2.167–83, 644–54), while the doctrine that there exist innumerable world-systems raises difficulties for the notion of divine governance (2.1090–1104). Similarly, the long account of the causes of thunder and lightning at the beginning of Book 6 concludes with an extended satirical attack on the traditional belief that these phenomena are divine signs or weapons of the gods (6.379–422). Conversely, the digression on the cult of the earth-goddess Magna Mater at the center of Book 2 underlines the harmful consequences of false belief as a source of anxiety for the worshipper (the menace and dread associated with the goddess and her acolytes are leitmotifs of the passage: see especially 2.609, 619, 623, 632), anticipating a point made more explicitly at 5.1194–1240 and 6.68–79. The ethical implications of the discussion of the soul and sensation in Books 3 and 4 are similarly pointed up by the frame within which each book is set. Book 3 begins with a powerful analysis of the social upheavals consequent on ambition and acquisitiveness, traced by Lucretius to an unconscious fear of death (3.41–93), while the book ends with the famous diatribe or *consolatio* (830–1094) in which the poet shows at length how the Epicurean understanding of death as the end of experience renders all such fears meaningless and irrational. The syllabus to Book 4 lays emphasis on the anxiety occasioned by dreams (4.37–45, esp. 38 *terrificant*, “terrify”), while the book ends with the justly celebrated diatribe against the passion of romantic love (4.1058–1191)—both of which are shown to arise from the misinterpretation of



sense-data, which are nevertheless in themselves wholly reliable (4.757–67, 1037–57).

The Epicurean analysis of desire, while not set out in detail anywhere in the poem, is implicit at several points. In particular, Lucretius lays emphasis on the limits of pleasure, and on the inherent insatiability of those desires that have no concrete object (for Epicurus, those that are unnatural and unnecessary). The former theme is powerfully expressed in the recurrent image of the leaky vessel (3.936–37, 6.20–21, and compare the allegorical interpretation of the Danaid myth at 3.1003–10), but most extensively developed at the end of Book 5, where warfare and social conflict are seen to be rooted ultimately in ignorance of the nature and limits of true pleasure (*quae sit habendi / finis et omnino quoad crescat vera voluptas*, “the boundary of ownership and limit on the increase of true pleasure,” 5.1432–33). Implicit here is the theory that, once freedom from physical and mental disturbance has been attained, pleasure admits of no increase, only variation (*KD* 3, 18): thus, in the account of early developments in music that leads up to this general conclusion, *satietas cibi* (“sufficiency of food,” 5.1391) and the amicable and relaxed atmosphere amongst the primitive herdsmen seem important preconditions for the pleasure derived from the new invention; the poet emphasizes, too, that later refinements in musical technique cannot increase the pleasure it produces in the listener or performer (5.1409–11). Equally, ambition and romantic love, in particular, are shown to be “empty” desires, which cannot in their nature be satisfied. Lovers do not know what it is that they want of each other, and are compared to a sleeper vainly attempting to satisfy a real thirst with dream-images of water (4.1076–83, 1091–1104).<sup>7</sup> Political ambition is figured in the posthumous punishment of Sisyphus, whose never-ending labor suggests the inherent impossibility of fulfilling this objectless desire (*imperium quod inanest nec datur umquam*, “power which is empty and is never achieved,” 3.998); the image of Sisyphus’s impossible task has reverberations elsewhere in the poem, where competition for fame and power is troped as a pointless and ultimately self-defeating uphill struggle (2.12–13, 5.1120–35).

In addition to these explicit interventions, Lucretius finds more subtle ways of underlining the ethical implications of his teaching. In particular, illustrative material overtly introduced to clarify a particular theoretical point seems often to be chosen for its symbolic value as much as its



immediate contribution to the argument. Two particularly clear instances are found, again, in Book 2: in explaining, respectively, that a large variety of atomic types is necessary to account for the diversity in nature, and how macroscopic objects can appear stationary even when their atomic components are in perpetual motion, Lucretius dwells at some length on a mother cow's ability to identify her own calf amongst many (2.352–66), and on the spectacle of flocks or military maneuvers which—when seen from a great distance—present the appearance of an immobile patch of brightness and color (2.317–32). Both examples seem pointed. Striking, in the first case, is the apparently otiose detail that the calf sought by the mother cow has been slaughtered *as a sacrificial victim*: the sympathetic portrayal of the cow conveys a hint of anti-religious polemic. In the second example, the “distant viewer” can be interpreted as a figure for the philosophically enlightened individual, who will be emotionally distanced from the apparently impressive displays of (in particular) military and political might: this reading is reinforced by a comparison with the proem to Book 2, where the pleasure of philosophical detachment is explicitly likened to the satisfaction of viewing “the mighty conflicts of war,” in the secure knowledge of one's own exemption from danger (2.5–8).<sup>8</sup> Again, images of bodily mutilation, which occur, with an overtly illustrative function, at several points in Book 3 and elsewhere, can be seen to contribute to the poem's protreptic purpose. Such reminders of our physical vulnerability at once lend urgency to the confrontation with our mortality which lies at the heart of the work, and provide tellingly gruesome images of the futile conflicts from which Epicureanism can help us to escape.<sup>9</sup>

The climactic instance of this technique is the account of the Athenian Plague with which the poem ends. Closely based on Thucydides (2.47–53), and overtly introduced as a mere illustration of the preceding exposition of the mechanics of disease and epidemic, this lengthy finale (6.1138–1286) has often been found problematic.<sup>10</sup> It has been noted, however, that where Lucretius's version departs from (or apparently mistranslates) that of Thucydides, the effect is to exaggerate the psychological effects of the disease, in particular the anxiety and depression that afflict the sufferers.<sup>11</sup> The passage seems, accordingly, to invite interpretation on the symbolic as well as the literal level: the epidemic, whose symptoms include restlessness (6.1160–62, 1178–81; cf. 2.9–13, 3.62–63, 3.1053–67, 6.15–16, of the

wearying struggles occasioned by ambition and anxiety), burning heat (1145, 1168–69; cf. 4.1086–87, 1090, etc. for similar imagery used of the passion of erotic love), and unquenchable thirst (1176–77, 1264; cf. 3.1003–1007, 4.1097–1101, where “empty” desire is figured as unsatisfied thirst, or as a cracked vessel which cannot be filled) is at once a metaphor for the “plague” of *kenodoxia* or false opinion and a powerful illustration of the ill-effects produced by the fear of death, which—on Lucretius’s account—greatly exacerbates the physical pain experienced by the sufferers. Equally, the plague-narrative has been described as a kind of final exam for the reader: if we have truly attained the state of contemplative detachment depicted in the proem to Book 2, we should be able to read these harrowing lines and remain unmoved.<sup>12</sup>

If, though, the poem’s didactic technique, with its subtle interweaving of physics and ethics, seems distinctively Lucretian, we have yet to confront the more controversial question of whether the poet innovates in the more narrowly philosophical sphere. Most scholars agree that the general lines of Lucretius’s argument follow Epicurus closely; indeed, David Sedley has argued persuasively that the poem’s sequence of argument is modeled specifically on the *On Nature*.<sup>13</sup> But it is less clear how much of the detail is Lucretius’s own, or how far (if at all) he adapts his model to take account of more recent developments.

For Sedley, Lucretius is an Epicurean “fundamentalist,” whose sole concern is—as the poet himself implies—with the writings of Epicurus.<sup>14</sup> Certainly, it is difficult to identify any passage in the *DRN* where the argument *could* not be derived from Epicurus himself, or which *must* be understood as directed against more recent opponents. In one sense, this is unsurprising: not only were the Epicureans in general notoriously devoted to the memory and the *ipsissima dicta* of their founder,<sup>15</sup> but Lucretius’s practice here would also accord with that of Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic didactic poetry, which often involves the versification or “metaphrasis” of a specific prose source.<sup>16</sup> Equally, Lucretius is clearly uninterested in later refinements to Epicurean doctrine, or in the minutiae of contemporary inter-school polemics, apparently taking it for granted that the founder’s own works offer sufficient ammunition against any potential opponent. Yet it is difficult to exclude the possibility that the poem ever has contemporary philosophical opponents (particularly the Stoics) in its sights, even if the

arguments Lucretius deploys appear originally to have been directed against earlier targets.<sup>17</sup> Particularly striking is the prominence given by Lucretius to geocentric cosmology (in the finale to Book 1, 1052–1113) and to divine providence and anthropocentric teleology (5.156–234, anticipated at 2.167–82)—both central and well-known aspects of Stoic doctrine. In Sedley’s view, the target in both cases is Platonic/Academic rather than Stoic;<sup>18</sup> but we may, equally, take Lucretius to be, implicitly, *redeploying* Epicurus’s arguments against his contemporaries, even if they are less well suited to this purpose than to their original object. Striking corroboration for this interpretation is offered by a recently discovered fragment of Diogenes of Oenoanda,<sup>19</sup> which closely parallels *DRN* 5.165–73 but is aimed *explicitly* at the Stoics: as Martin Smith suggests in his discussion of the fragment, Diogenes and Lucretius are perhaps independently adapting to similar ends an argument originally directed by Epicurus at Plato’s *Timaeus*.<sup>20</sup>

Again, the fragmentary state of other Epicurean writings makes it difficult or impossible to judge the degree of Lucretius’s fidelity or innovativeness in areas where he is in effect our sole source. The discussion of the *clinamen* or atomic swerve at 2.216–93, for instance, is the only detailed account of this important element of Epicurean theory to survive. Another striking instance is the history of civilization at 5.925–1457: while Epicurus himself, as well as his successor Hermarchus and, later, Diogenes of Oenoanda, show an interest in early cultural developments, Lucretius’s account is much more extensive and comprehensive than the surviving fragments of these other texts, so that we have no way of knowing how much of the detail here is the poet’s own elaboration. Again, the subtle analysis in the proem to *DRN* 3 of the relation between the fear of death, “empty” desires, and social conflict has been seen by some scholars as innovative, by others as deriving directly from Epicurus.<sup>21</sup> Stronger arguments can be made for originality in Lucretius’s attack on the passion of love at the end of Book 4, which draws extensively on the language and scenarios of Roman comedy and contemporary love-poetry, and his subtle handling of Greco-Roman mythology, which (as I have argued in detail elsewhere) can be seen to respond both to modes of allegorical interpretation practiced by the Stoics and others, and to the exigencies of the poetic form, which invited a more detailed engagement with mythological tradition than Epicurus himself may have felt necessary.<sup>22</sup>

In some areas, it can be argued that Lucretius gives his own distinctive slant to Epicurean doctrine, without, however, departing radically from his model. Changes of emphasis can be observed, particularly, in the handling of religion and human-animal relationships. Where Epicurus urges his followers to take a full part in religious ritual, though without hope of gaining divine favor or avoiding divine hostility, Lucretius seems more outspoken in his criticism of contemporary religious practice.<sup>23</sup> We have already noted the satirical tone of the digression on the cult of Magna Mater at 2.600–60; still more marked is the condemnation of religious ritual, as “no piety at all” (*nec pietas ulla*) at 5.1198–1203. Lucretius’s portrayal of animal sacrifice seems particularly hostile: the mordant reference here to “spraying the altars with abundant blood of four-footed beasts” (*aras sanguine multo / spargere quadrupedum*, 5.1201–1202) may remind us of earlier, and equally negative, accounts of human and animal sacrifice in the proem to Book 1 (Iphigenia, 1.80–101) and in Book 2 (the sacrificed calf, 2.352–54). This emphasis may perhaps be connected with Lucretius’s generally sympathetic presentation of (domestic) animals: in particular, the poet seems to deviate marginally from Epicurean orthodoxy in his handling of human-animal “contracts” at 5.864–77.<sup>24</sup> Epicurus (*KD* 32) appears to imply that animals, being irrational, cannot be partners to the kind of contract-formation that constitutes the foundation of legality and justice in the human sphere, and the point is made explicit by Hermarchus (Porphyry *De abstinentia* 1.12.5–6 = Hermarchus, Longo Auricchio fr. 34); Lucretius, on the contrary, suggests that certain animals are subject to a kind of mutually beneficial contractual arrangement, voluntarily (5.868 *cupide*, “eagerly”) entered into by both parties, and that such arrangements are, indeed, what enabled these species to survive.

A final area of controversy is the extent and nature of Lucretius’s engagement with Empedocles. The Presocratic philosopher is highly praised—in striking contrast to Heraclitus and Anaxagoras, both of whom are made the objects of ridicule—at 1.716–33, and it is universally agreed that the poetic technique of the *DRN* has much in common with that of Empedocles: in particular, Lucretius’s adaptation to didactic ends of such epic features as formulaic repetition and the extended simile seems much indebted to Empedocles’s analogous exploitation of Homeric form; both writers, too, make extensive use of argument from analogy.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, a number of close verbal echoes have been detected, particularly in the

proem to Book 1 and the zoogony of 5.783–924; but there is considerable disagreement as to the implications of these echoes. Sedley, pointing to the hostile attitude of earlier Epicureans, as attested particularly by Hermarchus’s work *Against Empedocles*,<sup>26</sup> contends that Empedocles’s *On Nature* is exclusively a poetic model for Lucretius; others have argued that acknowledgment of an important literary forebear is complemented by a subtler engagement at the philosophical level.<sup>27</sup> On this latter view, the echoes draw out similarities between (certain elements of) Empedoclean and Epicurean doctrine, while scrupulously “correcting” such aspects of the former as are incompatible with the latter. The Venus and Mars of the proem, for example, can be understood, on one level, as Lucretian counterparts of Empedocles’s *Philia* and *Neikos*, and—as Sedley points out—the subsequent lines 56–57 (quoted above) have strong overtones of the Empedoclean cosmic cycle, particularly recalling fr. 17.1–2. But, at the same time, the Lucretian lines lay strong emphasis on the fact that *Natura* is both the creator and the destroyer of material objects, and (as we have seen) implicitly reject the notion that the divine has any part to play in these processes. Thus, the passage can be understood as offering a corrective of, as well as a nod towards, the Empedoclean cycle: Lucretius accepts the idea that “birth” and “death” are really no more than combination and dissolution (cf. Empedocles fr. 8), while emphatically rejecting Empedocles’s dualism and the divinity of his cosmic forces.

## POETIC FORM

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Whatever we make of the relationship between the *DRN* and the thought of Empedocles, however, we can agree that Lucretius’s adaptation of Empedoclean poetic form to the presentation of Epicurean philosophy is his greatest and most striking innovation. Lucretius will have received little encouragement here from the writings of Epicurus himself, whose hostility towards the liberal arts in general and poetry in particular was notorious in antiquity.<sup>28</sup> Later Epicureans, particularly Philodemus, show considerably more interest in poetry, music, and rhetoric; but the notion that didactic epic might offer a suitable vehicle for the presentation of Epicurean physics remains a startling and paradoxical one.

Epicurus's isolated remarks on the subject of poetry and *paideia* (liberal education or elite cultural formation) in general, along with the—often hostile—testimonia to his views, suggest that his central objections were two: the study and practice of poetry (and of the other arts) bring no real benefit to the individual, and are in effect a waste of time and effort which would be better devoted to philosophy; and, by the same token, the cultural prestige accorded to traditional *paideia*, and poetry in particular, is utterly misguided.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, neither the style nor the traditional subject-matter of the more elevated poetic genres is likely to have commended them to Epicurus and his followers. The mythical world-view embodied in and transmitted by the poets is consistently represented by Epicurus as a source of *tarachē*, or mental disturbance, and opposed to rational thought and philosophical reflection; and his apparent preference for a simple, unadorned style (DL 10.13; cf. Cic. *Fin.* 1.14–15) might be thought to rule out the figurative and stylized language of the poets as a suitable vehicle for the communication of philosophical ideas. While, then, the wise person will derive enjoyment from artistic performances (like other sources of sensual pleasure), he or she will not set undue store by poetry or other art-forms, and will not actually compose poetry (or at least not “assiduously,” *ἐν ἐργῶς*, DL 10.120).<sup>30</sup>

The fragments of Philodemus's treatises on poems, music, and rhetoric serve on the whole to corroborate this position. Philodemus is dismissive of the notion that there is any inherent benefit to be derived from poetry or music, and denies that any great expertise is necessary for the practice or correct judgment of poetry and (epideictic) rhetoric.<sup>31</sup> To be sure, the very existence of these treatises, not to mention the fact that Philodemus was himself a poet,<sup>32</sup> testifies to a certain shift away from the very negative attitude apparently manifested by Epicurus himself; yet nothing in either the philosophical works or in Philodemus's own poetic output appears as unorthodox as the literary form of the *DRN*. While an Epicurean subtext is, arguably, detectable in many of Philodemus's epigrams,<sup>33</sup> the small scale and relatively lowly generic status of epigram in antiquity are relevant factors here: Philodemus could plausibly claim to have abided by the spirit of Epicurus's injunctions not to engage too seriously in the study or composition of poetry, in a way that Lucretius assuredly could not.



On the contrary, whereas Epicurus had warned his followers to “hoist sail and steer clear of all *paideia*” (DL 10.6 = Usener 163), Lucretius finds a way of appropriating the high value traditionally accorded by the Greco-Roman elite to literary culture in general and epic poetry in particular. The programmatic passages of the *DRN* suggest ways in which Lucretius’s project can be understood as conforming, in broad terms, to Epicurean principle, while at the same time stressing the value of poetic form as a teaching tool. Like his mentor, Lucretius is critical of his poetic predecessors; yet he suggests that poetry can nevertheless constitute a highly effective vehicle for the communication of rational argument, and—still more—a powerful means of attracting potential converts in the first place.

A key passage here is the poetic manifesto of 1.926–50, repeated as the proem to Book 4.<sup>34</sup>

avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante trita solo. iuvat integros accedere fontis atque haurire, iuvatque novos decerpere flores insignemque meo capiti petere inde coronam unde prius nulli velarint tempora musae;	930
primum quod magnis doceo de rebus et artis religionum animum nodis exsolvere pergo, deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida pango carmina, musaeo contingens cuncta lepore. id quoque enim non ab nulla ratione videtur;	935
sed veluti pueris absinthia taetra medentes cum dare conantur, prius oras pocula circum contingunt mellis dulci flavoque liquore, ut puerorum aetas improvida ludificetur labrorum tenuis, interea perpotet amarum	940
absinthe laticem deceptaque non capiatur, sed potius tali pacto recreata valescat, sic ego nunc, quoniam haec ratio plerumque videtur tristior esse quibus non est tractata, retroque vulgus abhorret ab hac, volui tibi suaviloquenti	945
carmine Pierio rationem exponere nostram et quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle, si tibi forte animum tali ratione tenere versibus in nostris possem, dum perspicis omnem naturam rerum, qua constet compta figura.	950



I roam through trackless places of the Muses, trodden by no foot before mine. It is pleasant to approach untouched springs and drink, and pleasant to pluck fresh flowers and seek a glorious garland for my head in places whence the Muses have crowned no other head; because, in the first place, I teach about great things and proceed to free the mind from the tight bonds of religion; and, secondly, because I compose such bright verses on an obscure theme, coating everything with the charm of the Muses. This too seems not without reason; rather, just as when doctors are trying to administer bitter wormwood to children they first coat the cup around its rim with sweet, golden honey so that the children, in their unsuspecting youth, may be deceived just as far as their lips, and meanwhile drink up the bitter juice of wormwood and be charmed yet not harmed, but rather may be healed in this manner and become well again; in the same way now, because this philosophy of ours seems on the whole rather bitter to those to whom it is not familiar, and the masses shrink back from it, I have desired to set out our philosophy for you in the sweet-speaking verse of the Pierides and, so to speak, to coat it with the Muses' sweet honey, in the hope that, in this way, I might perhaps keep your mind fixed on my poem until you perceive the entire nature of the universe and how it is composed.

The densely metaphorical texture of this passage is typical of Lucretius, and serves indeed to exemplify the very point at issue—the virtues of poetic form and poetic diction. Also typical, however, is the careful, almost prosaic articulation of the argument (*primum ... deinde ... id quoque*, “in the first place ... secondly ... this too,” 931–35; *veluti ... medentes ... sic ego nunc*, “just like doctors ... in the same way I now ...,” 936, 943), which repays careful scrutiny. The opening metaphor of untrodden ground, then, emphasizes three key factors: the novelty of Lucretius's enterprise, the pleasure he experiences in composing poetry (*iuvat ... iuvatque*, “it is pleasant ... and pleasant ...,” 927–28), and the prestige he stands to gain (*insignem ... coronam*, “a glorious garland,” 929). In the subsequent lines, these claims are justified in turn on three grounds: (i) the poem's (Epicurean) subject-matter and its purpose, to free the reader from the bonds of *religio*, are inherently valuable; (ii) verse-form confers clarity (“brightness”) and attractiveness (“sweetness”); and (iii) poetic form and philosophical subject-matter serve in combination to heal the reader, who is

compared to a child coaxed into taking bitter medicine by the ancient equivalent of a sugared pill.

The initial claim to innovativeness serves both to evoke the poetic ideals of Callimachus—an extraordinarily influential figure in Roman poetics at this period—and to distance Lucretius from his literary predecessors. The image of the garland connects these lines with the encomium/critique of Ennius earlier in Book 1 (117–26), where celebration of the epic poet’s undying glory (his “garland of everlasting leaves,” *perenni fronde coronam*, 118) is combined with condemnation of his utterly wrong-headed eschatology. The link between the two passages seems important, pointing both to Lucretius’s self-conscious hijacking of the prestige associated with Ennian epic form (he, like Ennius, is assured a “glorious garland”) and his equally self-conscious distancing from traditional epic subject-matter. To put it another way, the highly polished verse-form of the *DRN* is what will persuade an aristocratic audience to take it seriously;<sup>35</sup> its subject-matter both contributes to its literary value, by enabling the poet to do something really new, as prescribed by the Callimachean poetic creed, and makes the work acceptable in philosophical terms. Indeed, Lucretius represents himself as, in his own way, repeating the achievement of Epicurus: the latter “roamed through the uncharted universe in thought” (*omne immensum peragravit mente animoque*, 1.74), while Lucretius’s similar, if more modest, achievement is to “roam through” (*peragro*, 1.926) the realm of Epicurean physics, previously untouched in Latin verse.

The emphasis at the beginning of the passage on the pleasure of poetic composition is complemented by the insistence in the honeyed-cup simile on the pleasure experienced by the reader. Poetry, like honey, can “sweeten” what is not in itself attractive or appealing; its “consumption” is pleasurable.<sup>36</sup> In Epicurean terms, both the reading and writing of poetry are kinetic pleasures.<sup>37</sup> But, crucially, the reading and writing of poetry *on Epicurean themes* may also contribute to the attainment of the katastematic pleasure of *ataraxia*: the purpose of this poem is to remove anxiety by “freeing the mind from the tight bonds of religion” (931–32; also, we might add, from unlimited desire and the fear of death). Important, too, is the connection between pleasure and persuasion implicit in the honeyed-cup simile and particularly in the adjective “sweet-speaking” (*suaviloquenti*, 945). Lucretius makes this connection explicit at 2.171–74 and 257–60, where pleasure is portrayed as the “guide” (*dux*) that lies at the root of our

choices and avoidances (cf. Epicurus, *Ep. Men.* 129, “we recognize [pleasure] as our first, innate good, and on it we base every act of choice and avoidance”); but the notion is already represented metaphorically by Lucretius’s prayer to Venus in the proem. The goddess—called upon in the poem’s opening line as “pleasure of gods and men”—is asked for two things: to act as the poet’s ally (*socia*), granting him her “charm” (*lepos*) in the composition of his poem (1.24–28), and to persuade the god of war, with her “sweet words” (*suavis . . . loquelas*, 1.39; cf. 945 *suaviloquenti*), to confer peace upon the Roman world. Neither request can, of course, be meant literally in Epicurean terms (insofar as the gods, having no connection with or influence on the human world, cannot legitimately be asked for anything); but both make good sense if Venus is in part a metaphor for the pleasure that it is our instinct to pursue. Programmatically, then, Venus’s “charm” and her “sweet words” stand for the persuasive power of (verbal) pleasure, which will in this work be placed at the service of Epicurean *galenismos* or “pacification.”

These interrelated programmatic passages, then, suggest a way that the enjoyment of poetry can become “choiceworthy”: the sensory pleasures of rhythm and verbal music have an inherently attractive and thus persuasive power which may (though of course need not) be used as a means to the ultimate ethical end, achievement of *ataraxia*. By the same token, Lucretius offers an implicit answer to Epicurus’s ban on “assiduous” poetic composition. Poetry is, to be sure, a “laborious” art (*laborem*, 1.141), but one worth undertaking in the service of a greater good. In the proem to Book 1 (136–45), the pleasure of poetic composition is linked to the (anticipated) pleasure of friendship: here the didactic convention of address to a named individual converges with Epicurean theory, according to which the acquisition of friends is a good in itself (SV 23). At the same time, the poet tellingly characterizes his poetic lucubrations as “peaceful” (*serenas*, 1.142),<sup>38</sup> with the implication that the effort involved in composing (Epicurean) verse does not in itself constitute any impediment to the writer’s *ataraxia*.

We have yet to consider the emphasis on clarity common to the honeyed-cup passage and the address to Memmius in the proem. In both instances, poetry is represented as shedding light on a “dark” theme (*Graiorum obscura reperta / . . . inlustrare Latinis versibus*, “to shed light in Latin verse on the dark discoveries of the Greeks,” 1.136–37;

*praepandere lumina menti, / res quibus occultas penitus convisere possis*, “to spread light before your mind so that you might see things deeply hidden,” 1.144–45; echoed at 1.933–34, 949–50). What Lucretius might mean by this is most clearly illustrated by two passages early on in the poem. The very first (and therefore perhaps inherently programmatic) extended simile in the poem at 1.271–97 is designed precisely to enable us to “see” the invisible. Lucretius’s point here is that we do in fact assent to the existence of corporeal but invisible entities: and this contention is supported by an extended comparison between the action of the wind and that of a river in spate. His conclusion (295–97) is that since river and wind have the same effects in the visible world, they must be similar in structure at the microscopic level. Striking here is the point-for-point comparison between the two physically similar entities: both break down trees, make a loud crashing noise, roll objects before them, etc. Here, then, we have a first instance of the celebrated “multiple-correspondence simile,”<sup>39</sup> also exemplified in the honeyed-cup passage (where doctor and patient stand for poet and pupil, medicine for philosophy, honey for poetry, etc.). At 2.112–24, a comparison between atomic motion and that of dust-particles in a sunbeam is accompanied by explicit methodological reflections: the dust-particles can serve as a visual analogy (*simulacrum et imago*, 112), pattern (*exemplare*, 124), or trace (*vestigia*, 124) of the invisible phenomenon. Indeed in this instance, the relation between *comparanda* is still closer than one of analogy, since the movement of the dust-particles is ultimately *caused* by that of the atoms (2.132–41).

Here, Lucretius’s poetic practice is clearly licensed by Epicurus’s insistence on the importance and reliability of sensory evidence (*Ep. Hdt.* 38, *KD* 23–24), and his advocacy of analogical reasoning (Usener 36 and 263 = *DL* 10.32, *Plut. Adv. Col.* 1124b). At the same time, as we noted above, Lucretius is indebted to Empedocles’s adaptation of the extended Homeric simile as an argumentative tool: once again poetic convention and philosophical principle coincide, or can be made to do so. In a more general sense, too, Lucretius turns to his advantage the tendency of (ancient) poetry towards concrete and sensuous detail, repeatedly evoking familiar, everyday phenomena (clothes drying in the sun, the behavior of children and domestic animals, the light of lamps, the touch of a cobweb, the lifting of early morning mist) by way of illustration for phenomena that lie beyond the threshold of sensation, or are remote in time or space.<sup>40</sup> Conversely,

abstraction and technical terminology are, on the whole, avoided: as has often been noted, for example, Lucretius has no single word for “atom,” but makes great poetic and argumentative capital of the metaphors inherent in his standard terms *primordia* (literally, the warp threads laid on a loom), *semina* (“seeds”), and *elementa* (“elements,” but also “letters of the alphabet”).<sup>41</sup> Metaphor, like the epic simile, can help the reader to visualize the abstract or phenomena not directly accessible to the senses: the world is woven together like a garment (and can fall apart like one: 5.94–95; cf. 5.267 and 389, where the heat of the sun is described as, literally, “unweaving” the sea), or assembled from different combinations of atoms like words from letters (1.196–98, 1.823–29, 2.688–99, 2.1013–22). Above all, atomic matter behaves in some ways like a miniature society, joining together in assemblies and alliances, but also engaging in never-ending internecine warfare.<sup>42</sup> But the poet is scrupulous in drawing attention to the point where the metaphors break down: the world was not “constructed” by a divine author or craftsman (5.156–234); the atoms are not alive, and their motions have no purpose or intention (1.1021–28, 2.973–90, 2.1058–63, 5.187–94, 5.419–31).

Lucretius’s poetry may be said, then, to “shed light on what is obscure” insofar as poetic form can help the reader to conceptualize what is abstract, invisible, or not immediately perceptible. Figurative language—in particular, the application of organic and social metaphors to the atoms, and personification of such abstractions as Nature<sup>43</sup>—certainly presents potential difficulties for the philosophical teacher; but Lucretius, as we have seen, appears well aware of these problems, and seeks to neutralize them through explicit disavowal of his own metaphors at key points in the poem.

The poetic form of the *DRN* may, in short, be described as both orthodox and unorthodox. In composing a poem on the theme of Epicurean physics, Lucretius marks a clear departure not only from Epicurus’s disdain for poetry and *paideia* in general, but even from the more tolerant attitude evident in Philodemus and—it appears—in other contemporary adherents of the school. Yet, as we have seen, he is careful to defend his project in terms of the fundamental principles of Epicurean ethics and canonic, and we cannot be sure that Philodemus, had he read the poem,<sup>44</sup> would not have approved.

# LUCRETIUS AND HIS CONTEMPORARY READERSHIP

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Invidia ... , ceu fulmine, summa vaporant  
plerumque et quae sunt aliis magis edita cumque;  
ut satius multo iam sit parere quietum  
quam *regere imperio res* velle et regna tenere.

DRN 5.1127–30

Envy, like lightning, usually scorches the highest peaks and whatever is elevated above other things; so that peaceful subjection is much better than the desire to hold sway over nations and rule kingdoms.

“tu *regere imperio populos*, Romane, memento  
(hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem,  
parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.”

Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.851–53

“You, Roman, remember (these will be your arts): to govern the peoples under your sway and impose stability upon peace; to spare those who accept your rule and overthrow the proud.”

Vergil’s inversion, in this famous passage from *Aeneid* 6, of Lucretius’s striking formulation of the Epicurean precept *λάθῃ βιώσας* (“live in obscurity”) points to a further important way in which our poet adapts his philosophical sources. The imperialist manifesto which Vergil places in the mouth of Aeneas’s father Anchises speaks to an important facet of elite Roman ideology: the ideas of destiny and world-rule on display here are readily paralleled in other literary texts, both earlier and later. The Vergilian echo, then, calls attention to Lucretius’s powerfully antagonistic stance in relation to traditional Roman values, and the challenge that his version of Epicureanism presents to conventional aristocratic ideals and codes of behavior.<sup>45</sup>

Though nothing is known for certain of the poet’s background or social status, it is clear that the work presupposes an audience drawn from the upper echelons of Roman society. Lucretius’s addressee, Memmius, is

usually identified with the Gaius Memmius who stood unsuccessfully for the consulship of 54 BCE;<sup>46</sup> the poet in any case makes it clear that his pupil is both politically active and (as we have already noted) a beginner in the study of Epicureanism. He is praised in the proem to Book 1 in terms suggestive of elevated rank and political achievement (1.26–27), and Lucretius observes in the same context that he cannot be expected to devote his full attention to philosophical study at a time when his country requires his services (1.41–43). Again, the reader is admonished in the proem to Book 2 (37–61) that neither wealth nor political/military office can offer an effective defense against fear and anxiety: the language here seems tailored towards a readership that might be expected to have such goals in view.

Whatever the nature of the relationship between the poet and the historical Memmius, then, the latter can be understood as functioning within the poem as a representative member of the Roman upper-classes. The encomiastic tone of the first proem is soon abandoned, however, and Lucretius offers an increasingly negative analysis of the motives that drive the politically engaged individual, and of the violence and social conflict consequent on ambition and competition for power. In the context of the mid-first century BCE, these themes were highly topical: whether we accept the traditional date of c. 55 BCE, or adopt Hutchinson's proposed re-dating to 49/48, the poem belongs to a period of considerable political and social upheaval, if not (yet) outright hostility between the rival warlords Caesar and Pompey.

Lucretius incorporates in the proem to Book 3 a powerful sketch of a society riven by greed, ambition, and unbridled competition for power and influence (3.70–77):

sanguine civili rem conflant divitiasque  
conduplicant avidi, caedem caede accumulantes;  
crudeles gaudent in tristi funere fratris  
et consanguineum mensas odere timentque.  
consimili ratione ab eodem saepe timore  
macerat invidia ante oculos illum esse potentem,  
illum aspectari, claro qui incedit honore,  
ipsi se in tenebris volvi caenoque queruntur.

They acquire property through civil bloodshed and greedily double their wealth, heaping slaughter on slaughter; they rejoice cruelly at a brother's sad death, and hate and fear the tables of their kin. In the same way, and



owing to the same fear [sc. of death], envy often torments them because *that man's* power is plain to see, *that man*, who flaunts his glorious honors, is conspicuous, while they themselves—they complain—are wallowing in darkness and filth.

These lines resonate strikingly with the theme of moral decline and (consequent) socio-political corruption prominent in the literature of the late Republic and early Augustan period: certain poems of Catullus, and many passages scattered through the Ciceronian corpus, attest to a strong sense of anxiety relating to the greed, luxury, and excessive personal ambition which are commonly held responsible for social breakdown and civil strife.<sup>47</sup> Sallust (in the opening chapters of the *Catiline*) and Livy (in his preface) are typical in attributing to the increased wealth and luxury, leisure (*otium*), and sophisticated pleasures of their contemporary Rome a supposed decline from the virtuous competition for glory characteristic of the early republic.<sup>48</sup> Cicero similarly connects civil conflict with financial greed and profiteering (*Off.* 2.27–29); elsewhere in the same work (1.25–26), ambition and the accumulation of wealth are presented, more problematically, both as necessary to the aspiring politician and as tending to corrupt.

Against this background, Lucretius's analysis of political competition and social breakdown stands out for its originality. As we noted above, there is some disagreement amongst scholars as to the extent to which Lucretius has elaborated on Epicurus's theory of unconscious motivation in the proem to Book 3; but, certainly, his application of these ideas to the contemporary Roman context seems strikingly innovative.<sup>49</sup> In the prehistory of Book 5 (1113–35), Lucretius implicitly rejects the idea of decline from an earlier period of moral purity and altruistic public service, tracing back the connection between political activity and the desire for wealth and power to the most rudimentary stages of social development; the very notion of moral degeneration is correspondingly lampooned at the end of Book 2 (1157–74). Moreover, the Ciceronian (and traditional Roman) ideal of *virtuous* competition for prestige and public office is itself called into question: Lucretius suggests both in the proem to Book 3 and in Book 5 that the pursuit of power can always be traced to, ultimately, selfish motives, arguing that it is rooted in a desire for personal security and protection against others (5.1120–22; cf. 3.65–67). For the Epicurean, this

desire is not in itself unreasonable; but the equation of power with security is fundamentally misconceived, since, in addition to the needless toil involved (5.1131–32; cf. 2.9–13, 3.62–63) the wealthy and powerful in fact expose themselves to envy and therefore greater danger than the obscure (5.1123–35). Furthermore, the “empty” or unlimited nature of the desires in question means that they can never be fulfilled; the pursuit of more and ever more will always eventuate, Lucretius suggests, in violent conflict 5.1430–35:<sup>50</sup>

ergo hominum genus incassum frustra laborat  
semper et <in> curis consumit inanibus aevum,  
nimirum quia non cognovit quae sit habendi  
finis et omnino quoad crescat vera voluptas.  
idque minutatim vitam provexit in altum  
et belli magnos commovit funditus aestus.

Thus the human race toils ever in vain and for nothing and wears out its life with empty anxieties, because, to be sure, they do not know what limit there is to ownership and in general how far true pleasure can be increased. This, then, gradually launched life further into the deep sea and stirred up a great swell of war from the depths.

The way out of this cycle, Lucretius insists, lies in withdrawal from the political rat-race (5.1129–35), and—above all—in the study of Epicurean philosophy. As he explains in the proem to Book 3, the desire for security is rooted ultimately in the fear of death, and it is therefore this fear that in the last analysis motivates the unlimited desire for power. (There is some dispute as to the logic of the argument at 3.59–71; as I read it, however, the point here is essentially the same as at 5.1120–22, that is, poverty and obscurity seem to “linger before the doors of death” owing to the—erroneous—belief that the wealthy and powerful are in a better position to protect themselves against the assaults of fortune and their fellow-citizens.)<sup>51</sup> Once, then, we have truly learned that death is literally “nothing to us” (3.830), the desire for power should cease to have any hold over us. In the ideal Epicurean community, as Alessandro Schiesaro puts it, “there would be no political activity in which to participate”: informal pacts of friendship, like those that governed the early human communities described

at 5.1019–27, should be all that is required to ensure harmonious coexistence among the wise.<sup>52</sup>

Just how radical this position is in Roman terms can be illustrated, once again, by a comparison with the line taken by Cicero in the *De officiis*. Here (1.69–73), contrasting the life of retirement with the life of public service, Cicero concedes that it is easier to maintain one’s equanimity in the former circumstances, but insists that suitably qualified individuals nevertheless have a duty to stand for public office, “for in no other way can the state be governed or greatness of spirit [*magnitudo animi*] be displayed” (1.72).<sup>53</sup> For Cicero, both the exercise of virtue and the smooth running of the community are dependent upon service to the state; for Lucretius, in contrast, we can best serve not only our own interests but (paradoxically) those of the community as a whole by *withdrawing* from public life and cultivating our *ataraxia*, since the empty desires which motivate political engagement and political competition are also, on his analysis, the causes of social conflict.

In addition to these passages, where (contemporary) social and political problems are overtly at issue, Lucretius can be seen to “Romanize” his Epicurean material in more subtle ways. Particularly striking is his use of what has been called “social metaphor,”<sup>54</sup> touched on briefly at the end of the previous section: the metaphorical “society” of atomic *concilia* and *coetus* mimics or shadows that of the human macrocosm. As Gail Cabisius and others have shown, the vocabulary Lucretius employs in describing the interaction of atoms and other non-human forces is in many places strongly reminiscent of the language of contemporary politics.

At 2.109–41 (a passage we have already considered from a different perspective), for example, the random motion of dust-particles and the underlying movements of atoms are described in terms strongly suggestive of the shifting political alliances of the period. The temporary conjunctions and separations of the particles are “meetings” or “assemblies” (*concilia*, 120) and “disagreements” or “quarrels” (*discidia*, 120); these motions betray “secret, clandestine activities” (*motus ... / ... clandestinos caecosque*, 127–28) at the atomic level.<sup>55</sup> Again, particles that are not part of compounds are “rejected from community” (*conciliis rerum quae sunt reiecta nec usquam / consociare etiam motus poetuere recepta*, “those that are rejected from the assemblies of matter and have not been able to gain

admission and ally their movements,” 2.110–11) and left to roam the void as stateless “outcasts” (*per inane vagantur*, “they roam the void,” 2.109), like the (human) exiles of 3.48–54. The chaotic motion of the atoms, or the shifting balance of the elements, is also figured, more drastically, as a (civil) war—an *aeternum certamen* (“everlasting conflict,” 2.118) or *pium nequaquam bellum* (“impious [i.e. civil] war,” 5.381).<sup>56</sup>

This complex of metaphorical language confers a certain urgency on Lucretius’s message, when considered in its immediate historical context. Violent upheaval at the atomic level is never-ending and inescapable; at the same time, however, a full *understanding* of the conflict inherent in nature can, paradoxically, enable the individual—and, ultimately, society as a whole—to avoid conflict on the human and political plane.

The cycle of growth and decay which—as we saw above—is a central organizing principle of the poem also gains particular resonance when considered from this perspective. The language of socio-political alliance and conflict is prominent here too: the “civil war” of the atoms and elements both contributed to the formation of our world (*discordia*, “strife,” 5.437; *proelia*, “battles,” 439) and will lead to its final collapse (5.380–84); both the world and the human body will cease to function and, ultimately, disintegrate when they can no longer withstand the “assault” of atomic impacts from without (2.1139–45, esp. *expugnata*, “taken by storm”). Here, the language of social collapse and military defeat can be linked to the narrative of growth and decline which dominates the end of the poem. The prehistory in the final section of Book 5 culminates at the peak (*cacumen*, 5.1457) of technological progress; this is immediately followed in the proem to Book 6 by lines in praise of Athens, as the birthplace of agriculture, law—and Epicurus. But the plague-narrative at the end of the book portrays the same city in a state of collapse, as social institutions break down under pressure of the disaster (6.1272–86). The two books taken together hint at a generalized account of the rise and fall of cities and civilizations—one that must by implication apply to Rome too. Moreover, as Schiesaro has pointed out, some of the plague’s symptoms are reminiscent of imagery used elsewhere in the poem of political ambition: the victims sweat blood (6.1147–48; cf. 5.1131), cannot rest (6.1160–62, 1178–79; cf. 2.12–13 = 3.62–63), and violate family ties (6.1239; cf. 3.83–84). There is perhaps a hint of contemporary Rome, then, in the historical Athens of the plague’s finale: Lucretius’s own society is in danger of

tearing itself apart—unless the plague of false opinion should be healed by the “medicine” of Epicurus’s philosophy (1.940–42 = 4.15–17; 6.24).<sup>57</sup>

Lucretius’s socio-political imagery, then, suggests that conflict both is and is not inevitable. The “war” of the atoms will, in the end, bring about the destruction of every individual, every city, and the world as a whole; but on the *human* level, there is—uniquely—a possibility of escape. Unlike atoms and natural forces, human beings have *libera voluntas* (“free will,” 2.256–57; contrast 1.1021–23 = 5.419–21, of atomic motion) and self-determination (cf. 2.1090–92). Peaceful coexistence, like that briefly experienced by early human beings (5.1019–27) is possible, if only we accept the healing message of Epicurus.

Epicurus himself is, tellingly, portrayed in terms which once again appropriate the language of contemporary political discourse. In the proem to Book 1 (62–79), his path-breaking discoveries are depicted as a mental “voyage” beyond the walls of the world, culminating in a “victory” over *religio*: the language is strikingly reminiscent of encomia of Alexander the Great, as well as suggesting the Roman institution of the triumph. Again, in the proem to Book 5, his subjugation of the passions is favorably compared with Hercules’s defeat of monsters (5.22–54), and his “gifts” to the human race with those of Ceres and Bacchus (5.13–21); Bacchus and Hercules were, significantly, favored models both for Alexander and for the Roman dynasts of the late Republic (and, later, for Augustus, at least as depicted by Vergil in *Aeneid* 6.801–805).<sup>58</sup>

Epicurus had advised his followers to keep out of politics (DL 10.119 = Usener 8), while apparently making some allowance for special circumstances which might make participation preferable to quietism (Cic. *Rep.* 1.10; Sen. *De otio* 3.2 = Usener 9). Lucretius seems to go somewhat further, exploiting the social and political upheavals of his day as an inducement to the reader. Passages such as the proem to Book 3, as well as—more subtly—the socio-political imagery employed throughout the poem, suggest that the problems of contemporary Rome could, ultimately, be cured through the rejection of false values which Epicureanism teaches. In the meantime, and in spite of 1.41–43, Memmius, and the reader-in-general, would perhaps best serve the *communis salus*—the health of the community—not, as Cicero so vehemently argues, by public service, but by withdrawal into a life of retirement and philosophical study.

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations from the *DRN* are taken from the OCT of C. Bailey; all translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> *cetera quae sursum crescunt sursumque creantur, / . . . omnia, prorsum / omnia . . . / perfacilest . . . haec reperire animoque videre / omnia quo pacto fiant quareve creantur, / cum bene cognoris elementis reddita quae sint*, "as for other phenomena which develop and come into being in the heavens above . . . for all of these, all of them I say . . . it's very easy to discover and see in your mind how they all come about or are brought into being, when once you have thoroughly understood the capacities of the primary particles."

<sup>3</sup> On the poem's structure, see most recently Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, 144–45; and Farrell, "Lucretian Architecture."

<sup>4</sup> On cyclical structures in the *DRN*, see especially Minadeo, "The Formal Design of *De Rerum Natura*" and *The Lyre of Science*; Liebeschuetz, "The Cycle of Growth and Decay in Lucretius and Virgil"; and Gale, "The Story of Us."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Asmis, "Lucretius' New World Order," esp. 149–57.

<sup>6</sup> Osborne, "Empedocles Recycled" argues that there is no good evidence that the *Physics* and the *Katharmoi* (*Purifications*) were in fact separate poems; cf. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, esp. 363–70; Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, 2–8; Inwood, *The Poem of Empedocles*, 8–21; Trepanier, *Empedocles: An Interpretation*, 1–30.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Konstan, *A Life Worthy of the Gods*, 70–3, who points to the contrast with the account a little earlier in Book 4 (870–76) of the physiological process whereby a real thirst is satisfied.

<sup>8</sup> On these two passages, see especially Segal, "*Delubra decora*: Lucr. II.352–66"; and De Lacy, "Distant Views" respectively.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. 3.170–71, 3.403–405, 3.408–15, 3.551–53, 3.563–64, 3.642–56, 3.657–63, 5.990–98, 6.1208–12; for the theme of bodily mutilation and its role in the poem's rhetorical economy, see

Segal, *Lucretius on Death and Anxiety*, 118–43; Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 240–79 (esp. 259–64); and Gale, “Contemplating Violence.”

<sup>10</sup> See, most recently, Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, 160–65, who believes that the abruptness and opacity of the ending are signs of incompleteness and argues that Lucretius, had he lived to give the poem its final revision, would have reworked the plague narrative in such a way as to make its ethical implications explicit.

<sup>11</sup> See esp. Commager, “Lucretius’ Interpretation of the Plague.” Particularly striking amongst the instances discussed by Commager are Lucretius’s translation *cor maestum*, “sorrowing heart” (6.1152), for Thucydides’s *καρδία*, “stomach” (2.49.3); *anxius angor*, “the torment of anxiety” (6.1158) for Thucydides’s *ταλαιπωρία*, “suffering” (2.49.4); the addition of references to the fear of death at 1208 and 1212; and the reworking of Thuc. 2.51.5 at 1239–42, where Lucretius introduces the notion that those who were too afraid of infection to visit the sick were duly punished by dying in solitude. On Lucretius’s adaptation of Thucydides, see now also Foster, “The Rhetoric of Materials”; on the plague as conclusion to the poem, see further Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus*, 257–66; Segal, *Lucretius on Death and Anxiety*, 228–37; P. G. Fowler, “Lucretian Conclusions”; Morrison, “Nil igitur mors est ad nos?”

<sup>12</sup> For this view of the finale, see esp. Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus*, 262–66.

<sup>13</sup> Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, 134–65; for a different view, see Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus*, esp. 13–35.

<sup>14</sup> Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, 62–93; cf. Furley, “Lucretius and the Stoics”; Gottschalk, “Philosophical Innovation in Lucretius?”; Farrell, “Lucretius and the Symptomatology of Modernism”; and (more cautiously) Montarese, *Lucretius and His Sources*, esp. 11–19; contrast esp. Schmidt, *Lukrez, der Kepos und die Stoiker*; and Schrijvers, *Lucrece et les sciences de la vie*. See also Kleve, “The Philosophical Polemics in Lucretius”; and the good brief discussion in Warren, “Lucretius and Greek Philosophy,” 22–31.

<sup>15</sup> A devotion for which they were criticized by both Cicero (*ND* 1.66, 72) and Seneca (*Ep.* 33).

<sup>16</sup> The classic example is Aratus’s *Phaenomena*, which follows Eudoxus for the astronomical sections and (apparently) Theophrastus for the weather signs; Vergil’s *Georgics*, in the next generation, is closely based, at least in part, on specific prose sources (see, e.g., Thomas, “Prose into Poetry”).

<sup>17</sup> For the possibility that Epicurus himself engaged in polemics against early Stoicism, see now Kechagia, “Rethinking a Professional Rivalry,” 136–40.

<sup>18</sup> Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, 75–82; cf. Montarese, *Lucretius and His Sources*, 14–18.

<sup>19</sup> NF 127, of which Smith fr. 20 is the continuation; the relevant passage overlaps the new and previously known text, at NF 127, col. 9.7–fr. 20, col. 1.3. The Stoics are identified as the target at NF 127, col. 7.9–11. For text, translation, and discussion, see Smith, “Excavations at Oinoanda 1997.”

<sup>20</sup> Smith, “Digging up Diogenes,” 72; cf. Smith, “Excavations at Oinoanda 1997,” 145.

<sup>21</sup> Contrast esp. Kenney, *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura Book III*, 83–4 with Konstan, *A Life Worthy of the Gods*, 40–1, 44–6. See now also McConnell, “Lucretius and Civil Strife.”

<sup>22</sup> For Lucretius’s exploitation of comic and other poetic models in the finale to Book 4, see esp. Kenney “*Doctus Lucretius*” (1970: 380–90 = 2007: 314–26); and Brown, *Lucretius on Love and Sex*, 132–42; for Lucretius’s handling of myth, see Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius*, esp. 26–50 and 129–38.

<sup>23</sup> See further Summers, “Lucretius and the Epicurean Tradition of Piety.”

<sup>24</sup> For a good discussion of Lucretius’s handling of relations between humans and both wild and domestic animals, see Shelton, “Lucretius on the Use and Abuse of Animals.”

<sup>25</sup> On Lucretius and Empedocles, see esp. Furley, “Variations on Themes from Empedocles in Lucretius’ Proem”; Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius*, 59–74; Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, 1–34; Campbell, *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution*, 1–3 and 101–109; Garani, *Empedocles Redivivus*. Amongst older studies, Kranz, “Lukrez und Empedokles”; and Bollack, “Lukrez und Empedokles” are still useful.

<sup>26</sup> On which see Obbink, “Hermarchus, *Against Empedocles*.”

<sup>27</sup> Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, 17–21; for the contrary view, see, e.g., Furley, “Variations on Themes from Empedocles in Lucretius’ Proem”; Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius*, 59–62 and 65–73; Campbell, *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution*, 1–3; Montaresi, *Lucretius and His Sources*, 224–35. Campbell, *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution* gives an exhaustive list of Epicurean polemics against Empedocles at 167–68.

<sup>28</sup> See e.g. DL 10.6 (= Usener 163); Cic. *Fin.* 2.12; Plut. *Non Posse* 1087a, 1094d–e, and 1095c–d; Sext. *Emp. M.* 1.296–99 and 6.27 (= Usener 229b).

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Cic. *Fin.* 1.72; cf. Metrodorus *ap.* Plut. *Non Posse* 1094e (with Blank, “*Philosophia and technē*,” 220); Phld. *De mus.* 4, col. 151.29–39 Delattre. For Epicurus’s views on the study and practice of poetry and the other arts, see esp. Asmis, “Epicurean Poetics”; and Blank, “*Philosophia and technē*.”

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Usener 20 = Plut. *Non Posse* 1095c–d. The text and interpretation of Diogenes’s report are problematic: see Asmis, “Epicurean Poetics,” 21–2; and Sider, “Epicurean Poetics: Response and Dialogue,” 35–6 (who proposes the emendation *ἐν ἐργῶς* for the MS *ἐν ἐργεῖν*; the more commonly accepted emendation is *ἐν ἐργεῖν*).

<sup>31</sup> See esp. *De poem.* 5, cols. 25.30–4 and 32.17–19 Mangoni; *De mus.* 4, col. 147.6–27 Delattre; *De rhet.* 2b, col. 22.36–9 Longo Auricchio; for full discussion, see Asmis, “Epicurean Poetics”; Blank, “*Philosophia and technē*”; Pace, “La poetica epicurea di Filodemo di Gadara”; Janko, *Philodemus On Poems Books Three and Four*, 223–27; Halliwell, *Between Ecstasy and Truth*, 304–26.

<sup>32</sup> Some thirty-four epigrams are preserved in the *Greek Anthology*: see Sider, *The Epigrams of Philodemos*.

<sup>33</sup> So Sider, *The Epigrams of Philodemos*, 32–9.

<sup>34</sup> Editors have often found the repetition suspect, but the passage should in my view be allowed to stand in both places: see Gale, “Lucretius 4.1–25 and the Proems of the *De Rerum Natura*” with a *historia quaestionis* at 1–5; and cf. Kyriakidis, “Lucretius’ *DRN* 1.926–50 and the Proem to Book 4.”

<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the earlier or contemporary Latin prose works of Amfinius, Rabirius, and Catius, which appear to have had some influence in non-elite circles, but to have been met with disdain by the educated (so Cicero, *Ac.* 1.5, *Tusc.* 4.6–7, *Fam.* 15.16.1; Cassius, *ap.* Cic. *Fam.* 15.19.1–2).

<sup>36</sup> For the notion that *carmina* (“songs” or “poems”) and honey are the limit-cases of pleasure in the spheres of sound and taste respectively, see 2.504–506.

<sup>37</sup> For the pleasures derived from sound and form, see Usener 67; cf. also SV 27 for the study of philosophy as a (kinetic) pleasure.

<sup>38</sup> The adjective is perhaps particularly striking for the learned reader as a self-conscious variation on a well-known phrase of Callimachus: praising Aratus’s *Phaenomena* in *Epigram* 27 Pfeiffer, Callimachus commends the poet for his “intense wakefulness” (σύντονος ἀγρυπνίη, 27.4). Lucretius’s wakefulness (*noctes vigilare*, 1.142) is just as effortful (*laborem*, 1.141) as that of his didactic predecessor, yet does not compromise his serenity.

<sup>39</sup> West, “Virgilian Multiple-correspondence Similes and Their Antecedents”; on Lucretius’s use of simile and analogy, see also Schrijvers, “Seeing the Invisible”; Hardie, *Virgil’s Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium*, 219–33; Schiesaro, *Simulacrum et imago*; Garani, *Empedocles Redivivus*, 95–150.

<sup>40</sup> Clothes drying: 1.306; children and domestic animals: (e.g.) 2.317–22, 5.883–85, 5.1030–32, 5.1063–77; lamp-light: 5.294–99; cobwebs: 3.383–84; morning mist: 5.460–66.

<sup>41</sup> Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* includes excellent studies of Lucretius's avoidance of (technical) Greek (35–61) and constructive use of metaphor (193–99). On the atoms/letters analogy see esp. Friedländer, "Pattern of Sound and Atomistic Theory in Lucretius"; and Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura*, 11–30; on weaving metaphors, Snyder, "The Warp and Woof of the Universe in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*." For the problematics of Lucretian metaphor, see also Kennedy, "Making a Text of the Universe."

<sup>42</sup> See esp. 2.109–41, 2.323–32, 2.569–80, 2.1144–45, 5.380–95, 5.436–42, 6.364–78. As Garani points out (*Empedocles Redivivus*, 63–64), the nouns *concursum* and *congressum* and their corresponding verbs, used frequently by Lucretius of atomic aggregation, can be applied to military engagements as well as more peaceable "meetings." On Lucretius's use of military imagery in general, see Murley, "Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, Viewed as Epic"; Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius*, 117–27; and Garani, *Empedocles Redivivus*, 61–69; and cf. Asmis, "Lucretius' New World Order"; Shearin, *The Language of Atoms*, 82–97; and Gladhill, *Rethinking Roman Alliance*, 71–96 on the "pacts" or "treaties" of nature (*foedera naturae*).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Kennedy, "Making a Text of the Universe," esp. 216–24 (= 2007: 387–94).

<sup>44</sup> Knut Kleve claimed in 1989 to have identified tiny fragments of several passages from the *DRN* amongst the Herculaneum papyri (Kleve, "Lucretius in Herculaneum"; cf. Kleve, "Lucretius and Philodemus"). Kleve's identification has on the whole been accepted by scholars, but his further conclusion that Lucretius must therefore have had contact with Philodemus's circle has been less favorably received—the manuscript might, after all, have been added to the library at a later date, and its presence there in any case offers no strong evidence for *personal* contact between the author and the library's owner. See, most recently, Obbink, "Lucretius and the Herculaneum Library"; and—for a more skeptical response to Kleve's claims—Beer, "Lukrez in Herculaneum?" (I owe the latter reference to the late Professor E. J. Kenney, who generously read and commented on an earlier draft of this chapter.)

<sup>45</sup> Whether we read Vergil's appropriation of the Lucretian phrase as a straightforward "correction," or as subtly calling into question the mission that Anchises proclaims (as Lyne attractively suggests: Lyne, "Vergil's *Aeneid*: Subversion by Intertextuality," 194). On Lucretius's Romanization of his subject-matter, cf. now Gellar-Goad, *Laughing Atoms*, 185–210, who argues that the satiric coloring of, especially, the finales to Books 2–6 "puts [the poem's] message of Epicurean philosophy into direct contact with contemporary Roman social and political problems" (208).

<sup>46</sup> The identification is partly dependent on the dating of the poem, which remains uncertain: see, most recently, Hutchinson, "The Date of *De Rerum Natura*," with the response of Volk, "Lucretius' Prayer for Peace and the Date of *De Rerum Natura*"; and Krebs, "Caesar, Lucretius and the Dates."

<sup>47</sup> Most obviously, Catullus 64.397–406, where the emphasis on violation of blood-ties has some striking parallels in Lucretius (cf. *DRN* 3.72–73, 85–86); for poems with more obviously contemporary reference, cf. esp. 29 and 52. For Cicero, see, e.g., *Off.* 2.26–29.

<sup>48</sup> For a detailed comparison of the vocabulary of the Lucretian lines with passages in Sallust and Cicero, see D. P. Fowler, "Lucretius and Politics," 136–40.

<sup>49</sup> McConnell, "Lucretius and Civil Strife" argues persuasively that the theory of civil strife as a product of envy can be traced back through Epicurus to Democritus, but concedes that Lucretius has adapted his Epicurean sources to suit the Roman milieu, in particular in the emphasis he lays on ambition, the pursuit of prestige, and elite (as opposed to inter-class) rivalry.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. 3.68–71. For the unsatisfying nature and ultimate futility of political office-holding, see also 3.995–1002 (the punishment of Sisyphus) and 5.1226–35 (the *imperator* defenseless against the might of nature). The repeated phrase *fascis saevasque securis* ("the rods and cruel axes," with

reference to the emblems of curule magistracy; 3.996, 5.1234) draws attention, provocatively, to the application of Epicurean theory to a specifically Roman context; cf. also *petit aequora campi* (“makes for the level plain,” 3.1002), which perhaps points to the Campus Martius as an electoral venue.

<sup>51</sup> For a different interpretation, see Konstan, *A Life Worthy of the Gods*, 44–46.

<sup>52</sup> Schiesaro, “Lucretius and Roman Politics and History,” 49. For a somewhat different analysis, see Hammer, *Roman Political Thought from Cicero to Augustine*, 93–144, esp. 120–44, for whom Lucretius’s central concern is with autonomy and self-determination, within the constraints (*fines*) of natural “law”: Hammer argues that Epicurean enlightenment amounts to a capacity to liberate oneself from the false authority and dominion of tradition and social institutions.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Rep.* 1.1–12, where Cicero takes a less tolerant attitude towards the Epicurean preference for the life of *otium*.

<sup>54</sup> Cabisius, “Social Metaphor and the Atomic Cycle in Lucretius.”

<sup>55</sup> Cabisius, “Social Metaphor and the Atomic Cycle in Lucretius,” 116 compares Cic. *Cat.* 2.26 (Catiline’s *motus conatusque*); cf. also, e.g., *Rep.* 6.13, *Fin.* 1.44 and 3.63 for *concilium* and *discidium* in political contexts. For *motus* in the sense “revolt, uprising,” see *OLD* s.v. §9b. On the political connotations of the vocabulary throughout this section, see also D. P. Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 199–208.

<sup>56</sup> For the terminology (*bellum impium* = civil war), see Costa, *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura* V, ad loc.

<sup>57</sup> Schiesaro, “Lucretius and Roman Politics and History,” 55–58; cf. Cabisius, “Social Metaphor and the Atomic Cycle in Lucretius,” 118–20; P. G. Fowler, “Lucretian Conclusions”; Garani, *Empedocles Redivivus*, 69–71; Gardner, *Pestilence and the Body Politic*, 97–108; Gellar-Goad, *Laughing Atoms*, 206.

<sup>58</sup> For full discussion and references, see Buchheit, “Epicurus’ Triumph of the Mind”; suggestive remarks also in Davies, “Notes on Lucretius.”



## CHAPTER 17

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# HORACE AND VERGIL

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GREGSON DAVIS

VERGIL and Horace—the two representative Augustan authors whose poetics are the focus of this essay—were not only close associates within the literary circle of Maecenas, but intimate friends, as Horace famously made clear in designating Vergil in his *propempticon* marking the latter’s departure for Greece: “animae dimidium meae” (“half of my soul”) (*Odes* 1.3.8). A crucial element in their psychic bonding was a shared intellectual *bildung* in Hellenistic philosophy, most notably, in Epicurean thought. Owing to the anachronistic decoupling of philosophy and poetry on the part of many philological exegetes, the intellectual content of the works of these supreme artists of the Augustan age has often been relegated to the margins of inquiry.

For the poets Vergil and Horace, in particular, the line between instruction and pleasure was virtually indistinct. The most apt formulation of the notion of their deep imbrication was made by none other than Horace himself in a passage from the *Letter to the Pisos* (conventionally known as the *Ars Poetica*) (343–44):<sup>1</sup>

omne tulit punctum qui miscuit *utile dulci*,  
lectorem delectando pariterque monendo

He carries the day outright who mingles



*the useful with the sweet, thereby delighting  
and instructing the reader in like measure.*

In the same epistolary tract, he prescribes an education in philosophy as the ideal foundation for poetic *bildung* in a condensed *sententia*: “Good writing has its principal source in philosophy” (*scribendi recte sapere est et principium et fons*: 309). The prescriptions regarding the acquisition of *sapientia* for aspiring poets (the young addressees, the brothers Piso) corroborate what we learn elsewhere from Horace about his own interpretative attitude and presuppositions in his study of the Greek canonic writers. In regard to the Homeric epics, for instance, he unequivocally reads the poems as bearing an ethical subtext—an assumption that he foregrounds in a passage where he speaks in forthright terms about his educational foundations (*Ep.* 2.2.41–45):

Romae nutriri mihi contigit atque doceri,  
iratus Grais quantum nocuisset Achilles.  
adiecere bonae paulo plus artis Athenae,  
scilicet ut vellem curvo dinoscere rectum  
atque inter silvas Academi quaerere verum.

At Rome I had the opportunity to be nourished in my  
education on the extent to which the anger of  
Achilles had harmed the Greeks. Excellent Athens  
contributed a somewhat broader *bildung* [*ars*],  
so that I was understandably keen to distinguish  
between the straight and the crooked, and to seek  
the truth within the groves of the Academy.

The interpretation of Homeric narrative as embodying ethical values is developed more fully in *Ep.* 1.2.1–31, where episodes from both *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are brought into the argument.

The omnipresent didactic stratum in the poetics of Vergil and Horace is most manifest in the contested sphere of ethics, in which a “conversation” among these poets and leading exponents of Greek philosophical schools is clearly discernible. At the center of this conversation is the issue of identifying the mental obstacles to the attainment of *eudaimonia*.<sup>2</sup> Before delineating the ethical undercurrent that unites Vergilian and Horatian poetic discourse, a brief socio-historical prelude is in order.

It is a truism widely accepted that higher education for the Roman elite in the Late Republic consisted in the study of Greek philosophy. In

Horace's case, this meant, as we have seen, an obligatory visit to Athens, where he would have been exposed to the teachers and disciples of the regnant Hellenistic schools, in addition to the well-established successors to the Academy and Peripatos. Among the former were the arch-rival Stoic and Epicurean schools, both of whose central tenets are partly placed in contestation in Horace's earliest poetic collection, "Conversations" (*Sermones*).<sup>3</sup>

In respect to Vergil, the biographical tradition stemming from the *Vitae*, as well as from the *Catalepton*, relates that he studied philosophy with the Epicurean teacher, Siro, and he is reputed to have spent a substantial interval of half a decade or so in the region of the Bay of Naples.<sup>4</sup> The privileged status of the Campanian township of Herculaneum, in particular, in the history of the dissemination of Epicurean thought has received documentation from the writings of Cicero and, more amply, in the lacunose treatises of Philodemus that have been recovered from the carbonized papyrus rolls of the Villa of the Papyri, the presumptive owner of which was the Roman aristocrat, Lucius Calpurnius Piso. Fortunately, we no longer have to rely on the often unverifiable biographical tradition to confirm Vergil's extended contact with philosophical circles in Campania, since recent scholarship on the library of the Villa has brought to light a papyrus inscribed with the names of Vergil and Varus. Richard Janko's succinct account of this contact is worth quoting in full:

His [sc. Philodemus's] friend, the philosopher Siro, ran at his house in Naples a college, where Vergil and Varus studied Epicureanism from the late 50's onward; a papyrus confirms that Philodemus was a friend of Siro and spent time in Herculaneum, and in 45 Cicero paid him and Siro a generous tribute (*Fin.* 2.119). This association is confirmed by Philodemus' dedication of at least three books of his *On Vices and Virtues* to Vergil and three other young Roman poets, P. Quinctilius Varus, L. Varius Rufus and Plotius Tucca, who were all friends of Horace also (*Sat.* 1.5.39–42, 10.81).<sup>5</sup>

Prior to the discovery of direct papyrological evidence, we had indirect confirmation of Horace's contact with the Campanian Epicurean community through the significant references in his poetry to a close-knit group of poets, including, most conspicuously, Vergil. Among the most intriguing of these *loci* is the satire conventionally labeled the "Journey to Brundisium," in which the joyful reunion of the group of intimate friends/poets is accorded pivotal prominence (*Sat.* 1.5.39–44):

postera lux oritur multo gratissima; namque  
Plotius et Varius Sinuessae Vergiliusque  
occurrunt, animae, qualis neque candidiores  
terra tulit neque quis me sit devinctior alter.  
o qui complexus et gaudia quanta fuerunt!  
nil ego contulerim iucundo sanus amico.

The next dawn was utterly delightful; for at Sinuessa  
we were joined by Plotius, Varius and Vergil,  
the purest souls the earth has ever produced,  
to whom no one is more tightly bonded than I.  
What joyful embraces then took place! As long as my  
mind remains intact, there is no pleasure I would  
compare to that of a dear friend.

The close friendship among this circle of fellow poets around Maecenas takes on a distinctly Epicurean inflexion in another passage in the *Sermones* in which the speaker names members of the group whose friendship and critical acumen he especially cherished.<sup>6</sup> An important aspect of the association that resonates with Epicurean norms of friendship is the commitment of the participants to “frank criticism” of each other’s work—a practice to which Philodemus devoted an entire treatise.<sup>7</sup>

The following overview of the main contours of Vergil’s engagement with Epicurean values throughout his *corpus* begins with his earliest fully authenticated work, the *Bucolics* (*Eclogues*). The inaugural, programmatic poem in the collection contains several significant allusions to Epicurean thought, as mediated primarily, though by no means exclusively, via Lucretius’s enormously influential poem, *De rerum natura* (hereafter *DRN*). In the mellifluous song-exchange between the two poet-herdsmen, Meliboeus and Tityrus, it is the voice of the latter that purveys the tone and substance of certain key Epicurean values.

The poetic dialogue in *Eclogues* 1 has, as a core underlying concern, the ethical preconditions for the successful attainment of felicity (*eudaimonia*). The *eusebeia* of the fortunate poet-herdsman, Tityrus, is demonstrably framed within an ethical praxis that is irrefutably Epicurean in flavor.<sup>8</sup> This he articulates, in dialogue with his interlocutor, Meliboeus, in terms of his own *pietas*, which takes the form of his unwavering devotion to a beneficent, unnamed *deus* (lines 42–43; 59–63). In one of his rapturous prooemial encomia of Epicurus, Lucretius had provided Vergil with a model for describing the type of divinity whose claim to devotion rested on the

scope of his benefactions to mankind. In the prologue to *DRN* 5, Lucretius compares the highly touted benefactions of a selection of traditional divinities (e.g. Ceres, Dionysus) with those conferred by the philosopher of the Garden, and concludes emphatically that the latter's cognitive gifts far outweigh the formers' material contributions:<sup>9</sup>

confer enim divina aliorum antiqua reperta.  
namque Ceres fertur fruges Liberque liquoris  
vitigeni laticem mortalibus instituisse;  
cum tamen his posset sine rebus vita manere,  
ut fama est aliquas etiam nunc vivere gentis.  
at bene non poterat sine puro pectore vivi;  
quo magis hic merito nobis deus esse videtur,  
ex quo nunc etiam per magnas didita gentis  
dulcia permulcent animos solacia vitae.

For set against this the heaven-sent discoveries of others in the days of old. Ceres is fabled to have taught to men the growing of corn, and Liber the liquid of the vine-born juice; and yet life could have gone on without these things, as tales tell us that some races live even now. But a good life could not be without a clean heart; wherefore more rightly is he counted a god by us, thanks to whom now sweet solaces for life soothe the mind, spread even far and wide among great peoples.

Tityrus's praise of his anonymous *deus* in *Eclogues* 1 recalls the lines of the Lucretian intertext in a passage in which the latter makes the claim for the apotheosis of Epicurus: 1.6—cf. *DRN* 5.8: “He was a god, yea a god, noble Memmius” (*deus ille fuit, deus, inclute Memmi*).<sup>10</sup> Further details regarding the mode of Tityrus's devotion to his deified benefactor are fully in tune with, if they do not mimic, the prescriptions laid down by Epicurus in his will regarding the annual as well as monthly sacrifices to be performed posthumously in his honor (*Ecl.* 1.43–44).<sup>11</sup>

Philosophical implications are also latent in Vergil's portrayal of the world-view of Tityrus's benighted interlocutor, Meliboeus. The value system implied in the Epicurean precept, *nil admirari* (“marvel at nothing”), acts as an ethical shadow over the dialogue between the two herdsmen. The unenlightened stance (from an Epicurean perspective) towards the contemplation of another's *eudaimonia* is conspicuous in

Meliboeus's threefold repetition of the verb *mirari* ("to be amazed") in the first person (and with emphatic variation in tense inflection) (cf. *miror*: 11; *mirabar*: 36; *mirabor*: 69). Similarly imprudent is his decision to go into exile from his *patria* to the far corners of the world—a reaction to severe misfortune that is not only firmly opposed by the older and wiser Tityrus, but also reflects his failure to grasp the internal dimension of *eudaimonia* that renders external circumstances fundamentally irrelevant. Horace enunciates this philosophical insight with respect to the futility of "geographic flight" in terms that make clear the idea that is implicit in the Vergilian text: in *Odes* 2.16 (*Otium divos*) he deploys the striking gnome: *patriae quis exul / se quoque fugit?* ("what exile from his country ever also escaped himself?"). He makes the same point, though with more than a touch of sardonic humor, in the epistle to Bullatius (*Ep.* 1.11.27): "they change their climate, not their mind, who run away across the ocean" (*caelum non animum, mutant, qui trans mare currunt*).

The poem's closing lines supply a graciously harmonious cadence to the Epicurean notes of the Eclogue, with Tityrus inviting his interlocutor to share a plain and delectable feast with him, despite (cf. 69: *tamen*) the latter's determination to go away into exile (*Ecl.* 1.79–81):

hic tamen hanc mecum poteras requiescere noctem  
fronde super viridi. sunt nobis mitia poma,  
castaneae molles et pressi copia lactis.

Here at least you could rest tonight with me  
on a green couch of leaves: we have ripe  
apples, soft chestnuts, and lots of freshly pressed  
cheese.

Tityrus's gracious invitation to a rustic *cena*, which is meant to console Meliboeus for his extreme misfortune, closely follows the lines laid down by Epicurus in his *Letter to Menoeceus*, in which he recommends simple fare as an antidote to the downturns of fate: "Therefore becoming accustomed to simple, not extravagant, ways of life makes one completely healthy ... and makes us fearless in the face of chance [*tyche*]." <sup>12</sup> It is by no means fortuitous that "an abundance of cheese" (81: *pressi copia lactis*) is a conspicuous item on the proffered menu, in the light of a famous text of Epicurus that lauds cheese as amply sufficient for a delectable banquet:

“Send me a little pot of cheese, that, when I like, I may fare sumptuously” (DL 10.11).

Several of the Eclogues expose the perils incurred by a type of *amor* that was anathema to Epicurean eudaimonist doctrine. *Amor* of the unhealthy variety (*insanus*) is best embodied in the Gallus of *Eclogues* 10, whose unbridled infatuation for his *puella* is proxy for the erotic pathology germane to the Latin elegiac genre.<sup>13</sup> In the Epicurean world-view, amatory passion is pernicious if it becomes fixated on the obsessive pursuit of a unique *amatus/amata*, which condemns the lover to continual pain and inner insecurity. In the second Eclogue, Vergil points the way to a “therapeutic strategy” for this species of illness in the course of the soliloquy of the love-sick Corydon, who, at a climactic juncture in his *querela*, experiences a moment of enlightenment about the nature of his *dementia* and eventually vows to abandon his unsuccessful courtship of his *amatus*.<sup>14</sup> The fact that his self-diagnosis of *dementia* (69) constitutes a well-known Theocritean tag to the words of the love-sick Polyphemus (Theocr. *Id.* 11) in no way detracts from its therapeutic effect in the Vergilian adaptation.

Demented *amor* writ large is the major subtext of the mythographic program of verse sketched by the embedded speaker, Silenus, in the sixth *Eclogue*. The longest episode in Silenus’s catalogue of negative and mainly erotic *exempla* consists in a pathetic account of Pasiphae’s unnatural longing to be sexually united with the Minoan bull. The song delivered by the Silenus-persona is prefaced by a mini-cosmogony that clearly apes Epicurean, as well as Empedoclean sources, and the framing narrator hints in the lines preceding his effusion that the old seer himself engages in the kind of care-free enjoyment of sexual pleasure in the community of nymphs and satyrs that is the diametric opposite of that highlighted in his embedded poem.<sup>15</sup>

The *pietas* of Tityrus and of his fellow Arcadians is manifested throughout the Eclogue-book in their special devotion to the gods of the countryside. These divinities are united in their denigration of the species of amatory infatuation represented by Gallus, and as such they are portrayed as forming part of the procession of enlightened visitors who undertake to counsel the love-sick Gallus in an effort to restore him to his proper senses (*Ecl.* 10.24–30):<sup>16</sup>

venit et agresti capitis Silvanus honore,  
florentis ferulas et grandia lilia quassans.  
Pan deus Arcadiae venit, quem vidimus ipsi  
sanguineis ebuli bacis minioque rubentem:  
“**ecquis erit modus?**” inquit. “Amor non talia curat;  
nec lacrimis crudelis Amor nec gramina rivis,  
nec cytiso saturantur apes nec fronde capellae.”

Silvanus also came, his head adorned with  
the glories of the field, shaking flowering  
fennel and tall-stemmed lilies. Pan, Arcadia’s  
god, whom we have seen ourselves, came,  
ruddy with blood-red elderberries and vermilion.  
“**Will there ever be any end to this?**” he said. “Amor  
cares nothing for such matters; cruel Amor is  
never sated with tears, nor grass with rivulets,  
nor bees with clover, nor she-goats with leaves.”

Vergil’s critique of *insanus amor* on the grounds of its lack of limit (*modus*), a concept that is prominent in all three of his major works, was shared by his friend Horace. Theirs was not an unqualified antipathy to *amor* in general, but rather, in accordance with the dualistic conception of Eros current in the Garden, to a particular type of decadent passion deemed intrinsically insatiable, and hence counter-productive to the achievement of unalloyed pleasure as counseled by Epicurus.<sup>17</sup> Insatiability from this perspective encompasses the overly prolonged yearning for a deceased lover. The mythological paradigm for this excess is the poet Orpheus’s inconsolable mourning for the dead Eurydice, a narrative that forms the unforgettable conclusion of Vergil’s *Georgics*. Orpheus’s behavior, though treated sympathetically by the poet, represents the antitype of Epicurean wisdom on two fundamental counts: the musician’s utter refusal to accept the limit of death for mortals, and the immoderate grief for his lost *amata*.

Horace alludes to the Vergilian version of the Orpheus myth in an ode offering counsel to a member of their circle of close friends, the poet Valgius, who is unable to set a limit to his grief for a lost lover.<sup>18</sup> The Ode, which addresses Valgius in sympathetic tones (*amice Valgi*, 5), exhorts him to observe how each season in nature has its limits, and gently chastises him for his failure to give up his elegiac obsession for his *amatus*, Mystes (Hor. *Odes* 2.9.9–12):

tu semper urges flebilibus modis



Mysten ademptum, nec tibi vespero  
surgente decedunt *Amores*  
nec rapidum fugiente solem.

you without cease, however, carry on  
over the death of Mystes in mournful  
measures, nor do your *Love Songs* decline  
either when Vesper rises or when he flees  
the rapid sun's approach.

The phraseology of the stanza echoes Vergil's description of Orpheus's unceasing mourning in song for the deceased Eurydice (*Georgics* 4.464–66):

ipse cava solans aegrum testudine amorem  
te, dulcis coniunx, te solo in litore secum  
te veniente die te decedente canebat.

He himself [sc. Orpheus], consoling his love-sickness  
with his hollow lyre, sang of you, sweet spouse,  
of you by himself on the lonely shore, of you  
as the day began, of you as the day declined.

It is not merely the vowel music and the diction, but the underlying philosophical sentiment, above all, that brings the Horatian ode close to its sublime Vergilian intertext. The indirect obloquy of the latter in regard to Orpheus's ceaseless mourning is echoed in the former's frontal *parainesis* to the inconsolable lover, Valgius.

The role of religious devotion (*pietas*, *eusebeia*) in its potential contribution to human flourishing is a topic that Vergil broaches, not only in the *Eclogues*, as we have seen, but also at several junctures in the *Georgics*. Both ancient and modern scholars of Epicurean thought have amply discussed the rationale behind the apparent paradox of the school's observance of traditional cult practices while maintaining that the gods do not involve themselves in human affairs. Among the ancient sources, the biographer Diogenes Laertius is unequivocal in his account of the founder's *hosiotēs* ("religious devotion").<sup>19</sup> Lucretius points the way to a resolution of the ostensible contradiction between theory and practice by identifying enlightened, as opposed to banal, norms of piety grounded in a prior cognitive grasp of the true nature of godhead, such that the worshipper brings to the altar an attitude of emulation of divine beings, conceptualized as models of *ataxaria*.<sup>20</sup>

The finale of *Georgics* 2 contains a famous articulation of the connection between the philosophically informed cultivation of the gods, on the one hand, and the potential for human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) reached by a more conventional route, on the other (2.490–94):

**felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas**

atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum  
subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari:

**fortunatus et ille** deos qui novit agrestis

Panaque Silvanumque senem Nymphasque sorores.

**happy is the person who can gain knowledge of**

**the nature of things** and trample underfoot all fear of  
an ineluctable fate and the howling from insatiable Acheron.

**Happy also** is the person who knows the gods of the  
countryside: Pan and Silvanus and the sister Nymphs.<sup>21</sup>

The second beatitude (493: *fortunatus et ille* ... ) is synchronically juxtaposed with the first, not by an adversative, but by the copula <et>, thereby effectively positing a parallel route to *eudaimonia*. Notionally, the two proposed means of achieving felicity may be co-present in the same individual. The common denominator of both paths to happiness is the acquisition of **knowledge** (cf. *cognoscere* [490] with *novit* [493]). Commentators have consistently recognized a palpable reference to specifically Epicurean knowledge in the first beatitude (490: *felix qui potuit* ...), which openly annexes Lucretian diction, no less than ideational content, in a passage exalting the blessings conferred on mankind by Epicurus. Vergil's subtending of the bucolic deities, Pan, Silvanus, and the Nymphs (494), has the additional effect of associating "knowledge" of these minor *numina* with that precious strain of wisdom imparted via the teachings of the Garden.

The association made explicit here is foreshadowed in an immediately preceding "beatitude" passage in which Vergil compliments country folk in words that imply that happiness is a function of true knowledge of the good (458–59):

fortunatos nimium, **sua si bona norint**,  
agricolas!

Happy farmers! The more so, **if they**  
**came to know the nature of their blessings!**

Both *loci* on the necessity of knowledge to full happiness are followed by a demonstrably Epicurean set of prescriptive norms (well summed up in the injunction, *lathe biosas*) that advocate a disinterested attitude to socio-political and materialist striving (cf. lines 461–74 with 495–512).

A eudaimonist ethic forms the thematic substratum of Horace's four books of lyric poetry (*Carmina*), which match the Vergilian texts with respect to their occasional foregrounding of major Epicurean tenets. A preponderant obsession of the supreme poet of *Carpe Diem* discourse (hereafter CD) is the elimination of the fear of death as a necessary foundation for the enjoyment of a happy life bereft of anxiety. This nexus of ideas, which is commonly expressed in the motif cadre of the symposium, was endemic to the philosophical outlook of Horace's main literary models in the Archaic Greek literary canon—the *vates lyrici*.<sup>22</sup> In Horace's *Odes*, however, the nexus acquires a noticeable overlay of Epicurean thought as filtered through Lucretian verse, when not directly derivative of the master's ethical doctrines.

The perception that the happy life for mortals depends on a correct philosophical stance is prominently highlighted in the priamel that structures the initial dedicatory ode of the *Carmina*. Under the seemingly objective guise of listing the life-style preferences of others as foil to his own, Horace insinuates a biased description of the former that implies their intrinsic incapacity to exclude insecurity and angst from the human mind. At the same time, the motif of “adjunct pleasure,” as Shakespeare puts in a sonnet on personal erotic choice, recurs throughout the rhetorical foil—most conspicuously in the verbs *iuvare* (please) and *gaudere* (delight).<sup>23</sup> Pleasure, regarded as the main objective of all human behavior, is a key premise of the Epicurean ethical system, but Horace both obliquely and openly denigrates those many “others” who engage in misguided and unenlightened pursuit of it. The negative example of the conduct of the merchant sailor (*mercator*) is especially instructive from this angle of vision:

luctantem Icariis fluctibus Africum  
mercator metuens otium et oppidi  
laudat rura sui; mox reficit rates  
quassas, indocilis pauperiem pati.

the merchant, while fearing the South Wind  
battling with the Icarian waves, praises

the tranquility of the countryside near  
his home town; soon he refits his battered  
ships, a man unschooled in enduring  
a modest life-style.

As is the case in the many odes on the CD theme, the fear of death—famously devalued and vilified by Epicurus—is the unnamed specter that haunts the merchant sailor during the storm. The schooling that might have ensured the happiness of the *mercator* is typified by the inculcation of Epicurean doctrine concerning the removal of fear that accompanies the prospect of premature death.<sup>24</sup>

The Epicurean roots of the Horatian conception of *otium* in the context of lyric argument are at their most transparent in the poem that the commentators, Nisbet and Hubbard, have appropriately labeled “Horace’s Ode to Tranquility” (*Odes* 2.16).<sup>25</sup> The authors take due note of the multiple connotations of the word *otium* in Latin literature, but go on to maintain, correctly in my view, that the signification predominant in this *Ode* is tantamount to the notion of mental *tranquillitas*, which they regard as coherent with “the Epicurean character of the poem in general.” Their reading of the poem draws, with due acknowledgment, upon the pioneering work of H. P. Syndikus, who provides copious documentation in learned footnotes of the multifarious references in the *Ode*’s diction and ideas, not only to familiar Epicurean texts, such as the *Letter to Menoeceus* and the *Key Doctrines*, but also to salient passages in the *DRN*.<sup>26</sup>

In yet another utilization of the rhetorical form of the priamel, Horace provides the reader with an abbreviated catalogue of popular life-styles, beginning with the example of the merchant-sailor (*mercator*), which he earlier introduced, as we have seen, in the inaugural ode addressed to his patron and close friend, Maecenas (*Odes* 2.16.1–8):

**Otium** divos rogat in patenti  
prensus Aegaeo, simul atra nubes  
condidit lunam neque certa fulgent  
sidera nautis;  
**otium** bello furiosa Thrace,  
**otium** Medi pharetra decori,  
Grosophe, non gemmis neque purpura ve-  
nale neque auro.  
for *tranquility* the merchant prays when

caught in a storm on the exposed Aegean sea,  
the moment that dark clouds have hidden the moon  
and the stars cease to shine clearly for sailors;  
for *tranquility* prays Thrace, ferocious in battle,  
for *tranquility* pray the Parthians dressed with  
quivers, Grosphus—the kind that cannot be  
bought with gems, with purple, or with gold.

The remainder of the Ode exfoliates its “Epicurean character” with more than one significant echo of the well-known Lucretian proem to Book 2 of the *DRN*, in which the invulnerable speaker/*sapiens* famously contemplates the spectacle of the turbulent striving of the unschooled mass of mankind who have not absorbed the insights of the Garden (*DRN* 2.1–6):<sup>27</sup>

suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis  
e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;  
non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,  
sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suavest.

Sweet it is, when on the great sea the winds are  
buffeting the waters, to gaze from the land on  
another’s great struggles; not because it is pleasure  
or joy that anyone should be distressed, but because  
it is sweet to perceive from what misfortune you  
yourself are free.

The tenor of the poem’s central celebration of the “adjunct pleasure” of partaking in modest fare (*mensa tenuis*) is reminiscent of the passage in the *Letter to Menoeceus* (131, quoted above) that lauds plain living, and aligns it with the *otia dia* described by Lucretius in his sketch of an imagined Bucolic existence for primitive man, as well as the *otia* enjoyed by Vergil’s Tityrus-persona of *Eclogues* 1 (Odes 2.16.13–16):<sup>28</sup>

vivitur parvo bene, cui paternum  
splendet in mensa tenui salinum  
nec levis somnos timor aut cupido  
sordidus aufert.

that person flourishes on little, on whose  
sparse table there shines an inherited salt dish,  
and whose gentle bouts of sleep are not removed  
by fear or shameful greed.

Horace is at his most robust in his interrogation of ethical values as propounded by rival Hellenistic schools in the two books of *Satires*.<sup>29</sup> His “Conversations” (*Sermones*) on the topic are presented in a lively dramatic form, with the speaker challenging (and being challenged by) an equally vigorous and opinionated interlocutor. A common rhetorical strategy he employs in this genre is to set up Stoic mouthpieces as straw antagonists in his version of philosophical diatribe. Several poems in the two collections stage the author engaging in animated debates with Stoic *personae* who defend orthodox tenets of the school with inflexible dogmatism. Drawing on a repertoire of “Stoic Paradoxes” such as we have on record in Cicero’s treatise by that name, the Horatian satirist pillories relentlessly such well known Stoic doctrinal staples as, e.g., “all transgressions are equal” (*aequalia esse peccata*, cf. 1.3.96: *quis paria esse placuit peccata*); “only the wise man is rich” (*solum sapientem esse divitem*, cf. 1.3.124: *si dives, qui sapiens est*); “all fools are mad” (*omnem stultum insanire*, cf. 2.3.32: *insanis et tu stultique prope omnes*).<sup>30</sup> Other Stoic ideals, such as that of the uniquely free and autonomous sage, also come under negative scrutiny (cf. 2.7.83: *quisnam igitur liber? sapiens, sibi qui imperiosus*: “who then is free? The wise man, who has mastery over himself”).

Horace’s polemical method is to confront and debunk the fallacies of Stoic precepts by contrasting them in dialogue with Epicurean values to which he himself is demonstrably more sympathetic. For instance, in the third satire of Book 1, he interrogates a nameless interlocutor of decidedly Stoic persuasion and berates him by citing Epicurean doctrines based on Lucretian formulations, such as the utilitarian account of the social contract (cf. 1.3.98 *Utilitas, iusti prope mater et aequi*: “Expedience, mother, so to speak, of justice and right,” cf. *DRN* 5.1141–50). In two satires of Book 2 he choreographs encounters with named Stoic opponents that take place during the dramatic setting of the Saturnalia festival, a period of licensed social role reversal which permits slaves, in particular, to dress down their masters for their ethical failures. The character Damasippus in *Sat.* 2.3 is given leeway on center stage to spout the doctrine that all fools are mad in an amusing exchange in which the author of the satire is accused of hypocrisy and moral inconsistency; while in 2.7, a slave of Horace named Davus, who flaunts the Stoic maxim that “only the wise are free” is ridiculed by his master.<sup>31</sup>

The recurrent critiques of Stoic positions relating to the *sapiens* share a common premise that resonates with a fundamental Epicurean principle: the prudent observance of limit (*modus*) in the fulfillment of the human appetite for pleasure. The ramifications of this general prescription in the sphere of sexual fulfillment are graphically sketched in *Sat.* 1.2.111–26 in a passage of unabashed utilitarianism. Horace poses the question towards the end of a poem that, in the words of Sider, is “imbued with Epicurean coloring”:<sup>32</sup>

nonne, **cupidinibus statuat natura modum quem,**  
quid latura sibi, quid sit dolitura negatum,  
quaerere plus prodeat et inane abscindere soldo?  
  
surely it is more useful to ask **what limit nature**  
**imposes on desires,** what fulfillment she will bring  
to herself, what deprivation will cause her pain  
and to separate the void from the solid?

In arguing for a *parabilis Venus* (readily accessible sex) the satiric persona appeals to the authority of the philosopher-poet Philodemus by citing a line from one of his epigrams.<sup>33</sup>

Whereas in the generic context of the Satires Horace tends to concentrate his attention on the shortcomings and presumed absurdities of Stoic dogmas in the domain of ethics, he deliberately adopts a much more nuanced view of the school’s popular teachings in the *Epistles*, where he also refines his own pliant brand of Epicureanism. In an appropriately mellower tone, the initial poem of Book 1 signals the poet’s turn (or rather return) to the study of philosophy in terms that imply a dynamic shift to a more inclusive approach (*Ep.* 1.1.10–19):

nunc itaque et uersus et cetera ludicra pono:  
quid verum atque decens, curo et rogo et omnis in hoc sum;  
condo et compono quae mox depromere possim.  
ac ne forte roges quo me duce, quo Lare tuter;  
**nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri,**  
quo me cumque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes.  
nunc agilis fio et mensor civilibus undis  
virtutis verae custos rigidusque satelles;  
nunc in Aristippi furtim praecepta relabor  
et mihi res, non me rebus subiungere conor.  
  
so now I set aside my verses and all other toys.  
what is right and seemly is my study and pursuit,



and to that am I wholly given. I am putting by and  
setting in order the stores on which I may someday  
draw. Do you ask, perchance, who is my chief,  
in what home I take shelter? **I am not bound over  
to swear as any master dictates**; wherever the storm  
drives me, I turn in for comfort. Now I become all  
action, and plunge into the tide of civil life, stern  
champion and follower of true Virtue; now I slip  
back stealthily into the rules of Aristippus, and  
would bend the world to myself, not myself to  
the world.<sup>34</sup>

At a pivotal moment in his literary trajectory Horace portrays himself as eschewing adherence to any of the regnant Hellenistic schools and he frames this eclecticism within a bi-polar schema: at one extreme, he places the Stoics (16), at the other, the Cyrenaics in the person of Aristippus (18). He claims that he habitually slides back and forth between these two polar ethical systems. Where in this oscillation, we may ask, does his presumptive affiliation with Epicurean precepts fit in? To comprehend the vantage-point of the somewhat slippery epistolary *persona*, it will prove useful to delineate the main lines of his general refusal of orthodoxy in philosophical matters.

With regard to Epicurean doctrine pertaining to the merits of simple fare (discussed above), Horace subjects his own praxis to candid self-examination. We can infer the extent of his aberrations in the direction of over-indulgence in food and wine from the famous conclusion to his epistle to the elegist, Albius Tibullus, where he dubs himself, with obvious tongue-in-cheek, as “a hog from Epicurus’s herd” (*Ep.* 1.4.15–16):

me pinguem et nitidum bene curate cute vises,  
cum ridere voles, **Epicuri de grege porcum.**  
as for me, when you want a laugh, you will find  
me in fine fettle, fat and sleek, **a hog from Epicurus’s herd.**

In ascribing a common stereotype of the Epicurean flock to himself, Horace is engaging in playful repartee (“when you want a laugh”).<sup>35</sup> The self-deprecating quip, which is typical of Horatian endings in satiric discourse, may have had its counterpart in the kind of friendly critical banter on the part of a fellow-poet, who is described in the opening line as “frank critic of my *Conversations*” (*nostrorum Sermonum candide iudex*). True to form,

Horace makes a facetious confession of his transgression of the norms regarding over-consumption laid down by the founder.

Horace's coy admission of weakness in this area of conduct is a reminder that, as Woolf and others have shown, the Epicurean position on taking part in luxurious banquets is far less rigid than is commonly assumed.<sup>36</sup> Even in the *locus classicus* of the *Letter to Menoeceus*, Epicurus treats the occasional enjoyment of a luxurious feast as permissible to the *sophos*. Inadmissible, by the orthodox account, would be indulgence in an uncontrolled craving for such "natural but unnecessary" pleasures.

That Horace is cheerfully aware of his occasionally anomalous behavior in this regard is evident in other epistolary passages, such as his appeal to a friend named Numonius Vala, from whom he seeks advice on which resort in the Bay of Naples he should choose (in regard to its gastronomic reputation!) for a doctor-prescribed therapeutic sojourn with the words: "so that I may return home from there a fat [*pinguis*] Phaeacian" (*Ep.* 1.15.24). Similar facetious "revelations" occur in the epistles to Torquatus (1.5.12–15) and to Celsus (1.8.3–4), which further attest to the writer's nominal lapses from Epicurean guidelines in relation to the pleasures of the table and the doctrine of the *mensa tenuis*.

In his involuntional turn to a more relaxed ethical stance, Horace in the *Epistles* sets aside an uncompromising denigration of the Stoics' dogmas—such as we saw at work in the *Satires*—for a qualified approval of some aspects of their ideal of *Virtus*. This move is rendered less self-contradictory, however, by the observation that there exists a common, albeit restricted, ground where the two major Hellenistic philosophies may be seen occasionally to converge.

The unwavering pursuit of *virtus* is the main theme of *Ep.* 1.6, addressed to Numicius, which opens with the dictum, *nil admirari* ("marvel at nothing"), an injunction that has conceptual parallels in both Epicurean *ataraxia* and Stoic *apatheia*.<sup>37</sup> The epistle goes on to advocate the single-minded pursuit of *virtus* in language that approximates both the Stoic terminology in respect to the antitype of the insane *stultus* and the Epicurean insistence on setting limits to all desires (9–16).<sup>38</sup> The argument of the epistle to Quinctius Hirpinus (1.16) evinces an equivalent acceptance of the Stoic doctrine of the self-sufficiency of *virtus* in defining the ideal of the *vir bonus*.

Perhaps the stance that anchors Horatian moral philosophy in Epicureanist norms over the course of his career is the one reaffirmed in the closing lines of his final *Epistle* (2.2): pleasures (emblemized in the feast) are to be enjoyed in moderation, especially as one approaches old age (213–16):

vivere si recte nescis, decede peritis.  
lusisti satis, edisti satis atque bibisti  
tempus abire tibi est, ne potum largius aequo  
rideat et pulset lasciva decentius aetas.

If you do not know how to live aright,  
make way for those who do. You have played  
enough, have eaten and drunk enough. It's time  
to quit the feast, lest when you have drunk  
too freely, youth mock and jostle you, playing  
the wanton with better grace.

It is entirely in keeping with the Epicurean signature of the sentiment that it is linguistically indebted to a Lucretian conceit delivered in the voice of a personified Nature (*DRN* 3.938–39):

“cur non **ut plenus vitae conviva** recedis  
aequo animoque capis securam, stulte, quietem?”

“why not, **like a banqueter satiated with life**,  
withdraw with tranquility and enjoy, you fool,  
a repose liberated from care?”

The underlying philosophical concept of the mean, which depends on the judgment of when to apply *modus* to one's desires, plays a large role in Horatian lyric, no less than in the *Satires* and *Epistles*, and imparts a thread of coherence to the poet's deeply held convictions on the pursuit of happiness.<sup>39</sup>

The conversation with major Greek philosophers over the just observance of the mean recurs with high visibility throughout the major episodes of Vergil's epic narrative, the *Aeneid*. The moral parameters of the epic are set forth in an elaborate prologue in which the poet calls upon the Muse to enumerate the multiple motivations (*causas*) that lie behind the persistent anger of the goddess Juno—anger directed against his protagonist, Aeneas, whose outstanding virtue of *pietas* shows it to be unwarranted (8–11):

Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso,  
quidve dolens, regina deum tot volvere casus  
insignem pietate virum, tot adire labores  
impulerit. **Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?**

Muse, relate through me the causes: what feelings of  
anger and *lèse-majesté* drove the queen of heaven to cause a man so renowned for  
righteousness to go through so many troubles, to confront so many ordeals?  
**Can anger on this scale inhabit divine minds?**

The most salient feature of the rhetorical question posed by the narrator (“Can anger on this scale inhabit divine minds?”) is its indubitably Epicurean conceptual cast. Vergil here prominently interrogates the nature of the divine in terms that are derived from a central precept of the school: the total separation of the gods—both mentally and physically—from all involvement in human affairs. In so far as it is representative of all emotional disturbance, anger is ideally precluded from the Epicurean view of divine ontology, as enshrined in the very first of the *Key Doctrines*: “What is blessed and indestructible has no troubles itself, nor does it give trouble to anyone else, so *that is not affected by feelings of anger or gratitude*. For all such things are a sign of weakness.”<sup>40</sup> Lucretius provides a notably incisive enunciation of the doctrine at *DRN* 1.44–49:

omnis enim per se divum natura necessest  
immortali aevo summa cum pace fruatur  
semota ab nostris rebus seiunctaque longe;  
nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,  
ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri,  
nec bene promeritis capitur **nec tangitur ira.**

for the whole nature of the gods necessarily  
enjoys immortal existence in perfect peace, far  
removed and set apart from our affairs; for  
relieved of all pain, relieved of all dangers,  
potent by virtue of its own resources, without  
need of us, it is neither affected by our devotions  
**nor touched by anger.**

In foregrounding the theme of anger and its destructive repercussions in the very prooemium to the *Aeneid*, Vergil is, of course, taking his ethical cue (if we go along with Horace’s mode of reading as discussed above) from Homer’s *Iliad*, which is structured on the emotional trajectory of the *mēnis* of Achilles. Literary convention and Epicurean ethics are perfectly

compatible in this Vergilian interrogation of *ira*, for the moral failure of Achilles resides, by this account, not in the brute fact of giving vent to anger, but in the hero's reluctance to keep it within reasonable bounds.

Anger constitutes the macrocosmic thematic bookends, so to speak, of the *Aeneid*, which concludes with a display of fury and vengeance on the part of the Trojan founder of Rome. Aeneas's execution of Turnus in the closing episode of the poem has elicited controversy among philologists as regards its moral implications, and there exists an impressive body of literature in support of the view that Aeneas's rejection of Turnus's plea for mercy is reprehensible in its harshness. However, a non-superficial familiarity with the extant Epicurean corpus on the subject of anger (*orgē*, *thymos*) furnishes a salutary corrective to this reading.<sup>41</sup> As Indelli, Asmis, and other leading scholars of Epicurean thought have shown in erudite detail, the Epicureans' position on the "necessity of anger" was sophisticated and nuanced.<sup>42</sup> In their complex ethical system, anger was regarded as natural and acceptable under the right circumstances. The danger lay in the over-stepping of reasonable limit.

The Vergilian epic narrative implicitly discriminates between the irrational *ira* of Turnus (and his divine patron, Juno) and the justified ire of Aeneas. Thus when the latter catches sight of the baldrick of Pallas ornamenting the body of Turnus, he is rudely recalled to his obligation of *pietas* vis-à-vis his role of surrogate father bestowed on him by Evander. The execution of Turnus finds added ethical justification in the narrator's consistently negative characterization of Turnus as immoderate and intemperate. His abrupt intervention on the conduct of the victorious Turnus after the slaying of Pallas is ethically framed in generalizing terms (10.501–505):

nescia mens hominum fati sortisque futurae  
**et servare modum** rebus sublata secundis!  
Turno tempus erit magno cum optaverit emptum  
intactum Pallanta, et cum spolia ista diemque  
oderit.

The human mind is ignorant of its fate and future lot,  
**and of how to observe moderation** when elated  
with good fortune. The time will come when Turnus  
will wish he could buy back an unscathed  
Pallas, when he will hate those spoils and the day  
he took them.

The intrusion of the authorial voice in this passage foreshadows the eventual execution of Turnus, while providing the reader with a moral compass for judging the quality and necessity of Aeneas's explosion of righteous fury.

To conclude this synopsis of the ethical subtexts immanent in the poetic discourse of the two major Augustan poets: their relationship to Epicurean thought in all the various genres in which they excelled (bucolic, didactic, and epic, in the case of Vergil; satiric, epistolary, and lyric, in the case of Horace) is fundamentally elastic, rather than reverential in the manner of Lucretius. Despite this important qualification, however, both authors frequently and consistently utilized key Epicurean concepts pertaining to such human passions as *amor* and *ira* as a framework for "conversations" on topical issues in ethics surrounding *eudaimonia* and the achievement of mental tranquility. Ideas about the danger of extreme passions to human flourishing were in no way unique to Epicurean ethics. However, the terms in which these dangers were framed in the discursive universe of the Garden and in their transmission to educated Romans via Lucretius and influential Greek émigré teachers, such as Philodemus and Siro, were essential to shaping the cognitive landscape of Vergilian and Horatian poetics.

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<sup>1</sup> Horace is cited in the text of Klingner, *Horatius Opera*, with minor changes in punctuation. Unless otherwise noted, English translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup> The topic of Horatian thought on *eudaimonia* is treated briefly by Deschamps, “eudemonismo.”

<sup>3</sup> *Sermones* is Horace’s own name for the *Satires* and also of the *Epistles*.

<sup>4</sup> On the subject of Vergil’s Campanian connections, see Gigante, *Philodemus in Italy*.

<sup>5</sup> Janko, *Philodemus*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Sat.* 10.81–88.

<sup>7</sup> *Peri Parrhēsiās*. This work is available, with accompanying English translation, in the edition of Konstan et al., *Philodemus on Frank Criticism*.

<sup>8</sup> For Epicurean *eusebeia*, see Obbink, “The Atheism of Epicurus” and *Philodemus: On Piety*. The *Eclogue* is analyzed from this ethical standpoint in Davis, “Consolation in the Bucolic mode.”

<sup>9</sup> DRN 5.13–21. Text and translation are from Bailey, *Lucretius*. Gale, *Virgil on the Nature of Things* contains insightful remarks on Lucretian influence on the entire *Georgics*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. also *Ecl.* 5.64 (Menalcas to Mopsus): *deus, deus ille, Menalca*.

<sup>11</sup> See the excerpts of Epicurus’s will as transmitted in DL 10.18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ep. Men.* 131. The English rendition is from Inwood and Gerson, *The Epicurean Reader*, 30. On the Epicurean cadence of the invitation see Davis, “Consolation in the Bucolic Mode.”

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Ecl.* 10.9–69. Vergil’s critique of *amor insanus* in the *Eclogues* is treated in Davis, “A, virgo infelix.” It is typical of the author’s ethical discourse to show sympathy for victims of demented love, such as Gallus, Orpheus, and Dido.

<sup>14</sup> *Ecl.* 2.73. On Epicurean “therapeutic strategies” see Tsouna, “Epicurean Therapeutic Strategies.” It is significant that the Idyll’s prologue, addressed to a physician-friend, foregrounds the very issue of a successful remedy for *eros*.

<sup>15</sup> The hint of erotic badinage between Silenus and a nymph occurs in lines 20–21.

<sup>16</sup> Latin citations from the *Eclogues* are from the edition of Geymonat, *Vergili Opera*.

<sup>17</sup> Brown, *Lucretius on Love and Sex* deals extensively with the Lucretian account of Epicurean *eros*.

<sup>18</sup> On C. Valgius Rufus see *Sat.* 1.10.82–83, where Horace lists those whose literary judgment on his own work he approves. Page, *Horatii Libri IV*, ad loc. discusses the relative chronology of the two poems. An interpretation of the ode along ethical lines is to be found in Davis, *Polyhymnia*, 50–60.

<sup>19</sup> DL 10.9.

<sup>20</sup> DRN 5.1194–1203 and 6.1298.

<sup>21</sup> My English version treats the perfect tenses, *potuit* and *novit*, as gnomic, and the phrase, *metus omnis et inexorabile fatum*, as hendiadys. See further Davis, *Parthenope*, 168–69.

<sup>22</sup> *Odes*.1.1.35. On the philosophical element in early Greek lyric the work of Fraenkel, *Early Greek Poetry* remains fundamental. The motif structure of Horatian CD poetry is described in Davis, *Polyhymnia*, 145–88.

<sup>23</sup> See *iuvat*: 4 (repeated in ellipsis: 7); *iuvant*: 23; *gaudere*: 11. Cf. Shakespeare’s priamel on “adjunct pleasures” in Sonnet 91.

<sup>24</sup> On the complex nuances manifest in the fear of death, see Sanders, “Philodemus and the Fear of Premature Death.”

<sup>25</sup> Nisbet and Hubbard, *Commentary*, 252.

<sup>26</sup> Syndikus, *Die Lyrik*, 439–54. Among the most striking verbal imitations of Lucretius is the image of cares flitting around richly paneled ceilings (cf. lines 9–12 with DRN 2.28).

<sup>27</sup> Text and translation are here cited from Bailey, *Lucretius*. On the issue of the invulnerability of the *sapiens*, see Mitsis, *Epicurus' Ethical Theory*. The Epicurean disengagement from politics is ably treated by Fish, "Not All Politicians."

<sup>28</sup> DRN 5.1387; Vergil *Ecl.* 1.6.

<sup>29</sup> See Muecke, *Horace: Satires*, *passim* in regard to the satirical speaker of Book 2.

<sup>30</sup> In addition to these slogans reproduced in Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, see *Fin.* 4.19.55.

<sup>31</sup> For a judicious account of the philosophical and social issues at stake in this satire, see Muecke, *Horace: Satires*, ad loc.; Mayer, "Sleeping with the Enemy." Cf. Rudd, *Satires*, 1–35 on the diatribes of Book 1 of the *Satires*. For a thorough treatment of Horatian Satire in relation to Epicurean values (especially in the expositions of Philodemus) see Yona, *Epicurean Ethics*.

<sup>32</sup> Sider, *Epigrams*, 230.

<sup>33</sup> Sider, *Epigrams*, 230.

<sup>34</sup> Translations of passages from the *Epistles* are reproduced, with minor modifications, from Fairclough, *Horace*.

<sup>35</sup> Sider, *The Library* provides background on the stereotype, which is attested in visual, as well as literary sources. For aspersions of over-indulgence directed against the followers of Epicurus, see Cicero *In Pis.* 68–72.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Woolf, "Pleasure and Desire," 160–61.

<sup>37</sup> Fairclough, *Horace*, 284 extends the doctrinal horizon of this concept to include other schools of thought, such as those of Pythagoras and Democritus.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 1.2.56: *certum voto pete finem* ("aim at a fixed term to desire").

<sup>39</sup> On the fundamental concept of the relative mean in the *Odes* see Davis, *Polyhymnia*, 167–72.

<sup>40</sup> DL 10.139; translation is from Inwood and Gerson, *The Epicurean Reader*.

<sup>41</sup> For a sophisticated exposition of this view of the closure of the *Aeneid*, see Putnam, *Humanness*.

<sup>42</sup> See Indelli, "Vocabulary"; Asmis, "Necessity." Cf. Galinsky, "How to Be".

## CHAPTER 18

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### CICERO

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### CARLOS LÉVY

CICERO has often been considered, not without reason, as among those principally responsible for the negative image of Epicureanism in Western thought.<sup>1</sup> This would have us forget that he was educated in its doctrines at the feet of its greatest masters, as he emphasizes himself, and that he maintained friendly relations throughout his life with a great number of its followers. His first teacher—even before the Academician Philo of Larissa, and thus before 88 BCE—was the Epicurean Phaedrus, who succeeded Zeno of Sidon as head of the Garden.<sup>2</sup> During his journey to Athens and Asia Minor, between 79 and 77 BCE, he also had occasion to hear Zeno of Sidon, the old scholarch whose subtlety he later praised. Though stressing the depth of their philosophical differences, he maintained cordial relations with Phaedrus's successor, Patro. It is Patro who, in a somewhat paradoxical turn of events, asked Cicero to intervene on his behalf with Memmius, the dedicatee of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, to prevent a villa from being constructed on the site of Epicurus's house (Cic. *Fam.* 13.1.2–3). As for Philodemus, the Campanian master of Epicureanism, Cicero describes him along with Siron as “an excellent and very wise man” (*Fin.* 2.119). Further, in the *In Pisonem*, and thus in an eminently polemical context, Cicero contrasts the crudeness of Piso with the elegance of

Philodemus, whose refinement he upholds as a rarity (in his words) within the Epicurean milieu (*In Pis.* 70).

Generally speaking, therefore, his estimation of Epicureans as individuals is a distinctly positive one. He doesn't hesitate to note in the *Lucullus* that he counts many friends among their school, that they are men of worth, and that they are very affectionate with one another—an observation not bereft of irony, but founded in reality nonetheless (*Luc.* 115). How could these warm words for individual Epicureans coexist with Cicero's most vigorous condemnation of the doctrine they espoused? Such is the central question of Cicero's relationship with Epicureanism.

## CICERO, EPICURUS, AND EPICUREANISM

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One imagines that Cicero was fully conscious of the problem posed by this dissymmetry, judging by his letter to Cassius in mid-January 45.<sup>3</sup> He begins by reproaching his correspondent, who had converted to Epicureanism three years before, for having abandoned the camp of virtue for that of pleasure. He goes on to acknowledge, however, that Cassius had always preserved his dignity and courage, and concludes on an almost apologetic note:

As for this school you call your own, I fear that there is more energy in it than I had imagined if it has met with your approval.

As an adherent of the New Academy, and thereby seeking always to practice suspension of judgment, Cicero made sure never to exclude Epicureanism definitively from the ranks of the potentially true. His famous expression in the first *Tusculan*—"I would rather be wrong with Plato than right with men like these" (*Tusc.* 1.39)—surely applies in the first instance to the Epicureans; nevertheless, with regard to Epicurus himself, beyond the facile rhetoric of Cicero's wholesale condemnation one perceives an attitude far more complex. For Cicero, Epicurus is a character of contradictions—at times a philosophically ignorant enemy of culture or plagiarizing trickster, but also a man who knew how to confront suffering and death with great courage. For instance, in the *De finibus*, Cicero submits that the founder of the Garden had been, at least occasionally, a likeable and good man, but seizes upon a clause in Epicurus's will

providing for a yearly post-mortem banquet on his birthday (*Fin.* 2.103). How can one affirm that death is of no consequence while at the same time showing such concern for the perpetuation of one's memory? Book 2 of the treatise ultimately presents Epicurus as a sect leader anxious to protect his own cult of personality, evincing a mind confused to the point of dishonesty. At the same time, Cicero was aware that Epicureanism was not a bloc of monolithic dogma, and he eventually discusses the different versions of the doctrine, for example about friendship. One wonders if, instead of saying that he neither despises nor accepts Epicureanism,<sup>4</sup> it would not be better to say that he accepts it, like an unavoidable element of his intellectual and personal life, and despises it when it claims to reduce the complexity of the world to the movement of atoms and to replace the beauties of culture by the rudeness of materialistic physics. Rhetorical irony was a means of overcoming this contradiction.

## REFUTATION OF EPICUREAN PHILOSOPHY

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### Ethics

At the basis of Cicero's criticism of Epicurean ethics lay a dissonance between the Greek and Latin languages.<sup>5</sup> In Greek, *hēdonē* was a word with a certain philosophical depth, having been developed over many centuries by a wide range of philosophers. In Latin, *voluptas* was a term to which the *mos maiorum* conferred a clearly negative sense, considering it as a sensualist, egoistic, and immoral emotion. Cicero, who was bilingual, knew this conflict and was certainly able to understand all the nuances of Greek philosophical *hēdonē*, but he did not want to alter the traditional meaning of *voluptas*, which was for him connected, as a negative pole, with the positive pole of *virtus*, an intuitive but fundamentally true perception of what was the ultimate aim of an ethical life. From a conceptual point of view, the critique applied to Epicurus's ethics in *De finibus* 2 mirrors the critique of Stoicism in Book 4.<sup>6</sup> It demonstrates, along Socratic lines, that Epicureans and Stoics are incapable of correctly analyzing the concepts they employ and that this error of language renders both systems incoherent. Epicurus

had shown little concern for the definitional problems so central to Plato's dialogues, preferring to identify sensations and ideas with physical realities. It is precisely at this point that Cicero lays his attack. Taking up the mode of analysis Plato demonstrated in the *Republic* and *Philebus*, he replies to Torquatus that the absence of pain, which in Epicureanism represents the supreme form of pleasure, in fact constitutes an intermediate reality between pleasure and pain.

Employing the dichotomy, a method dear to the Academy, he endeavors to show that Epicureanism, as with Stoicism in a different context, claims to be a unique system while in reality melding two distinct and opposing doctrines. The definition of pleasure in its most common sense, as the first object of man's natural urges, should logically lead the Epicureans to admit that the ultimate end of existence resides in an existence which accumulates the greatest number of sensual pleasures. Thus Epicurus is accused of evading this logically necessary choice for tactical reasons, or, put another way, for fear of appearing to adhere to the most vulgar brand of hedonism. Epicurus is thus having it both ways: he earns himself a large following with the thesis that every pleasure is worth seeking, and with the claim that the absence of pain represents the final limit of pleasure he grants himself pseudo-philosophical cover at little real cost. For Epicurus, there was no difference of nature between the most common pleasure (a "kinetic" pleasure) and the inner perfection of the sage (the "katastematic" pleasure).<sup>7</sup> The absence of pain was from his point of view only the upper limit in the scale of pleasures—the perfect pleasure, but not a different kind of pleasure. Cicero, by combining a kind of naïve Roman realism with a fascination for the Platonic ontology of Forms, a fascination he expressed especially at the beginning of the *Orator*, denies that the essence of reality could be only the effect of a mere variation on limits.

Using for polemical ends the radicalism inherent in Chrysippus's classification, which held only three possible solutions—pleasure, moral beauty, and the combination of these two<sup>8</sup>—Cicero argues that the question leads ultimately to the incompatibility of pleasure with moral beauty. He then proceeds to reformulate his theories of virtue and happiness while assuming the superiority of reason to the senses. In similar fashion, he asserts that friendship cannot be based merely on selfishness. The book ends with a reflection on pain, which in particular challenges the Epicurean notion that the memory of happy moments can nullify the most intense

suffering. In affirming that every pain is evil, Epicurus has, according to Cicero, sapped strength from happiness by making it dependent on externalities.

It is in the final book of the *Tusculans*, without a doubt, that the complexity of Cicero's position finds its greatest expression.<sup>9</sup> Epicurus continues to be presented here as a contradictory being: the same man who maintains, deservedly, that the sage is always happy, does not hesitate to name suffering as the highest evil, such that if he has the shield of philosophy, he cannot in reality be considered as a philosopher. However, this contradiction between appearance and reality, so glaring in his theory, is overshadowed by Epicurus in practice, in his frugal life and heroic manner in death. Regardless of his own personal foibles, Cicero never considered philosophy as merely a theoretical exercise. He endeavored ceaselessly to put it into practice in the world, and above all in the forum. With Epicurus, he thus found himself confronted with a singular situation: a philosopher who, despite professing a doctrine founded on erroneous principles, had successfully articulated that philosophy in his own life, transcending thereby the incoherence of his doctrine. In Cicero's eyes, Epicurus had managed, despite all apparent paradoxes, to take his place in the great community of philosophers, which Cicero characterized by the perception, more or less complete, more or less clear, of the essential identity of virtue and happiness.

Friendship, a subject closely intertwined with ethics,<sup>10</sup> is at issue in one form or another in each of Cicero's moral treatises. In Cicero's relationship with Epicureanism, it assumes a critical place at the juncture of theory and practice, that is to say in the turbulent zone responsible for the tension between Cicero's anti-Epicurean convictions and his empathy for certain Epicurean practices. From a structural point of view, Epicurean friendship is characterized by a privileged society of fellow-feeling confidantes, a unique and necessarily restricted circle. By contrast, the Stoics conceived of sociability according to the famous concentric circles of *oikeiōsis*, which center upon the individual—which Hierocles portrays as the first circle<sup>11</sup>—and proceed outward toward humanity as a whole. In this social topology, the city finds itself both included and transcended; it is possible, put another way, for the non-sage to concern himself with political matters, leaving on a distant horizon the final circle, that of universal humanism—a Stoic notion that Cicero could not ignore and to which there are allusions in *De officiis*.



Cicero had to endure a long intellectual maturation, as well as the experience of seeing Rome torn apart by civil war, to be able to move beyond the *De re publica*, a political and historical treatise, to the ethical universalism of the *De officiis*.<sup>12</sup> The Epicurean conception of friendship was rooted in the concrete example of Epicurus's own estate, full of friends united by deep mutual affection, which constituted the idea's incarnation in history. Cicero, without denying the importance of friendship—naming it without hesitation as “the most precious thing in the world”—proceeds thoroughly to deconstruct the version of friendship that Epicurus espouses:

- Friendship is individual, that of Scipio for Laelius, or that of Cicero for Atticus. On this level friendship could flourish between an ex-consul and a bookish expatriate who resided far away from the forum's din. The society of friends, on the other hand, could not be dissociated at Rome with political friendship; as Laelius observes, “It is the business of everyday life which we must envision.” In this context, therefore, it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish transactional friendships, and thus ephemeral ones, from those intended to endure.
- Friendship cannot be considered as a harmonious refuge where the individual search for pleasure is transmuted into care for others. It must be governed by the “law of friendship,” which forbids keeping as friends those who have rebelled against the nation. In other words, in the *De amicitia*,<sup>13</sup> Cicero reintegrates friendship within the social structure of *oikeiōsis*, transforming it into a circle not locatable geographically, and not defined by ties of kinship, but intermediary between the individual and the city. As such, friendship too is subject to the law which provides that the outer circle must always be ethically prior to those it encompasses.

## Physics

With regard to physics, the accusation of plagiarism is even more pointed. Epicurus stands accused of having appropriated the atomist doctrine elaborated by Democritus. In the *Academica*, Cicero delivers this cruel

aside (*Lib. Ac.* 1.6): “If I gave approval to Epicurus—that is, if I gave it to Democritus.” Elsewhere, in the first book of the *De finibus*, Cicero allows that Epicurus had introduced a very few modifications regarding Democritus’s system, but adds immediately that these were just so many errors. Among these errors was a trust in physical sensations pushed to the point of affirming that the sun is as small as we perceive it, but also the *clinamen*,<sup>14</sup> by which the founder of the Garden sought to escape from Democritean determinism. For Cicero, the swerve of atoms is merely a gambit by which Epicurus endeavored to escape from the determinism caused by the vertical fall of his atoms, just as he had refused to accept the consequences of his choice of pleasure as the main principle of his ethics. In Cicero’s eyes, imagining a movement without cause is an absurdity all the more scandalous because one could easily dispense with the explanation—Platonic in origin, though the *De fato* makes no explicit mention of this—of an internal automotion within the soul, a force Cicero dubs the *motus voluntarius* (*Fat.* 48).

Turning from the soul to the heavens, whereas the Epicurean gods are isolated in their “interworlds” and unconcerned with human affairs, here as well Cicero—through the voice of Cotta, also an adherent of the New Academy—tries to enclose Epicurus in an intermediate space between illogic and dishonesty.<sup>15</sup> He reviews the many contradictions within the Epicurean concept of the divine, such as imagining the gods as happy, though they do nothing and virtue herself is an active principle. He concludes the refutation of Epicurean theology, in *cauda venenum*, by citing Posidonius, who asserted that Epicurean theology was nothing but a subterfuge to disguise an atheism which Epicurus feared would be unpopular (*Cic. ND* 1.123).

## Cicero and Roman Epicureans

It is fitting now to specify the relationship of the orator-philosopher to the history of Roman Epicureanism and to a certain number of his Epicurean contemporaries.<sup>16</sup> Cicero’s representation of philosophy, as with his vision of society, is strongly hierarchical,<sup>17</sup> constructed according to a *gradus dignitatis* with Plato—in his eyes, a man both philosophically and literarily

incomparable—at its summit. In such a scheme, Epicureanism sits undoubtedly on the plebeian rung. Cicero portrays the Epicureans as *minuti philosophi*, “tiny philosophers,” a minuscule mob which has invaded all of Italy.<sup>18</sup> Though unable to ignore the importance of Epicurean sects in places like Campania, this “plebeian” aspect of Epicureanism served for Cicero as a hyperbolic shorthand. The comparison of this doctrine’s implantation to a foreign invasion was his way of emphasizing its incompatibility with *mos maiorum*. Cicero’s insistence on characterizing Epicureanism’s Roman popularizers—men like Amafinius, Rabirius, and Catius—as dreadful translators was another means of suggesting that the Garden’s habitual disregard for traditional culture had been perpetuated in a Roman milieu. Such a third-rate effort, Cicero implies, could only win Epicureanism the attention of unsophisticated hicks.

Nevertheless, this metaphor has its limits. The philosophical plebeian, enthralled by Epicurus just as the *populares* would have been by such and such a tribune, was never presented by Cicero as politically threatening. Piso’s monstrosity was, in Cicero’s eyes, the product only of his personal perversity. In the *De legibus*, it is the New Academy far more than Epicureanism which appears, its spirit of criticism carried to an extreme, as the real threat (at least intellectually) to the institutions and traditions of the Roman mind (*Leg.* 1.39). Cicero could not ignore, of course, the attraction evidenced by Caesar and certain Caesarians toward Epicureanism, yet he ascribes far more responsibility to their personal characteristics than to the doctrine itself. As he asserts in the same passage, Epicureans who, faithful to their founder’s example, keep to their *hortuli*, their “little Gardens,” pose no threat to the state. Better to remain there, he implies, rather than mix themselves up in matters which surpass their understanding.

A few words with regard to Lucretius,<sup>19</sup> whom we know Cicero never invoked by name apart from a single letter to his brother Quintus in 54 (*Q. fr.* 2.10.3), in which he praises both the career and poetic talent of the *De rerum natura*’s author. Cicero has been suspected of having thus voluntarily obscured the work of a brilliant rival in order to present himself as Rome’s first true philosopher, and to bolster his argument that Epicureans were simple-minded rubes, incapable of either coherent thought or elegant expression. The willful eclipsing of Lucretius is a critical element in the darker portraits made of Cicero by his critics. The truth was surely more complex, as we must reason from the work’s reception in its own time. By

way of example, Cassius, the tyrannicide and nevertheless an Epicurean, expresses his regret in a letter of 45 that the Epicurean doctrine had been diffused in Rome by the hands of poor translators, Catius and Amafinius, each incapable of properly explaining it (*Fam.* 15.19.2). In this complaint Cassius makes no mention of Lucretius. In his *Libri Academici*, moreover, Cicero attributes a similar comment to Varro, which he would never have dared if Varro had been an admirer of Lucretius. It may be added more generally that in his treatises Cicero does not take up the debates of the philosophical present but rather those of his youth, when he had known Phaedrus, Philo of Larissa, and Antiochus of Ascalon.<sup>20</sup> He makes no explicit mention of Aenesidemus, his contemporary, who nevertheless had founded what we call “Neo-Pyrrhonian Scepticism.” Philodemus is no doubt present in the *In Pisonem*, and he was probably an important source in his composition of the first book of the *De natura deorum*, yet he is only cited once explicitly, in the *De finibus* (*Fin.* 2.119). It would thus be at the least imprudent to attribute this famous Ciceronian silence solely to an authorial jealousy compounded by an animosity toward the doctrine Lucretius had espoused.

We find an interesting example of Cicero’s relationship with the Epicurean scene in his correspondence with Cassius, a subject of much recent scholarly attention. In his letter (*Fam.* 15.16), Cicero alludes to the fact that Cassius’s latter-day conversion to Epicureanism had been prompted by the defeat of the republican camp, at which point he suggests that it was “the violence of armed men” which had prevailed upon Cassius to give up the cause of virtue. It is very likely that Cassius had previously expressed a predilection for Stoicism, evidenced in his citation of the maxim that moral beauty alone must be sought. One notices that the justification advanced by Cassius touches upon the difficulty in making Stoicism palatable to a wide audience. Presenting virtue as a means of attaining pleasure and tranquility, he argues, is both true and *probabile*, meaning that it can be both demonstrated and accepted. Reasoning thus, Cassius uses Cicero against Cicero, since the orator had himself criticized Stoicism for being—in its opaque and esoteric terminology, but also in the radical nature of certain doctrines—incomprehensible beyond a small circle of initiates. Far from serving as intellectual window-dressing, it is thus clear that in this age philosophy could, at least for a certain group of Romans, be the critical link between reflection and political action.

Why then did Cicero, schooled in Epicureanism in his youth, and surrounded by Epicurean friends, show such clear aversion to this doctrine, a doctrine for which he is nevertheless one of the best sources, both for the system itself and its reception by the Roman ruling class? Ultimately, too much of Epicurean doctrine ran at cross-purposes with the deepest currents of Cicero's personality. Accepting Epicureanism, in the first instance, would have required Cicero to admit that society and ethics had only the most unstable foundation: the desire and quest for pleasure. In its explanation of human behavior and the rules it fixed for governing that behavior, the Epicurean tendency to base everything upon selfish interest appeared both to contradict reality and to deprive axiology of any true foundation. However, Torquatus's account in Book 1 of the *De finibus* demonstrates that the acknowledgment of different faces of egoism could lead to a legitimation of apparently altruistic behavior, such as that of the speaker's ancestor, who had thrown himself at an enemy during battle to recover his necklace. Elsewhere, certain Epicureans had attempted to attenuate their Master's position, claiming that friendship was fundamentally based on a selfish calculation. Cicero could simply not accept a system of ethics under which virtues were only the means to secure pleasure, an idea he considered as contrary to man's true nature: rationality, culminating in a virtuous life as a social being. The idea that the fear of punishment alone sufficed to prevent an individual from committing injustice was for Cicero an invitation to dissimulate, not an exaltation of justice. What is more, for him who had placed such importance on the concept of free will as a self-generated cause (*Fat.* 25), the connection fashioned by Epicureans, or at least by Lucretius, between voluntary action and the *clinamen* (the swerve of atoms governed by mere chance) failed to provide a reasonable explanation. Worse still, this idea would inevitably act to dilute individual responsibility.

The Epicurean rejection of political affairs, moreover, though sometimes glossed over or even defied by its followers, collided with Cicero's aspiration to enroll himself in the *mos maiorum*, Rome's ancestral tradition, as demonstrated through service to the *res publica*. Paradoxically, Cicero's long public career was undoubtedly the source of many bitter disappointments, to the point of what André called his "yearning for an impossible retirement."<sup>21</sup> Notwithstanding these failures, Cicero would never concede that the Epicureans had been right about public service, nor

would he ever cease to uphold the models of statesmanship that had symbolized the Roman tradition at its best, men like Scipio Aemilianus and Gaius Laelius. Cicero's letters, so often critical of the men and mores of his age, could well appear as an illustration of the Garden's warnings against the inherent disappointments of politics. For Epicureanism, the essential community was that of a circle of friends. For Cicero, however, it was the *res publica*, which, thanks to the *imperium* which Rome wielded over a greater and greater portion of the world, led him naturally to the Stoic idea of the universal city, *cosmopolis*, which in Rome had seemed to find its geographical expression. Brought up in the idea, already well developed in the previous century by the poet Lucilius, that the Roman citizen must consider his own personal interests as necessarily inferior to those of the state, Cicero could scarcely admit a principle which placed absolute primacy on individual self-interest. Furthermore, having found deep intellectual reserves within the practices of Roman religion, he considered their preservation as an essential mission as well. It is this ambiguity which he would transfer to another Academician, Cotta, in the *De natura deorum*. Its first book comprises a critique of Epicurean theology, both harsh and well documented, under which gods were models for mankind, and by no means active participants in the life of the world.

By the same token, as the heir of a philhellenic tradition at Rome that had emerged in the previous century, Cicero was brought up to honor the *mos maiorum* and admire Greek culture simultaneously. The Epicurean devaluation of traditional Greek education, the *paideia*; its rejection of the *technai*, and in particular of the arts of rhetoric and dialectic; the often violent hostility of the Epicureans toward other philosophical schools; the claim to have refounded culture from orthodox principles; and a physics which even they considered to be conjectural: all this could appear as nothing more than a mixture of naivety and arrogance. So too, as a *homo novus*, brought up in the thrall of an aristocracy to which he did not belong, Cicero transposed into philosophical terms his need to admire what he had valued for so long. In very significant fashion, he makes the following confession to Lucullus: "As you well know, I have always had a deep fondness for the aristocracy." Intriguingly, the aristocracy and the philosophy to which he refers in this passage are not those of Plato but those of Democritus. An atomist could therefore be counted among the *nobilitas* of philosophy, inasmuch as he was venerable, enjoyed an

established place in the history of thought, and was accorded great respect even by his philosophical adversaries. Epicurus, a philosopher of relatively recent vintage, often presented as a plagiarist of Democritus, was clearly unworthy of a place among this *nobilitas*. It is perhaps the same fascination for worlds inaccessible or nearly so which explains why Cicero had been haunted by the idea of transcendence, to the point of presenting himself for initiation in the Eleusinian mysteries during one of his voyages to Greece and to which he intended to return in 44. Given such a perspective, Plato could be nothing but the *princeps* of philosophers and Aristotle his brilliant second-in-command. Stoicism, by the obscurity of its language, had still kept something of its necessary mystery for Cicero. Epicureanism, which counted immediate sense perceptions as necessarily true, rejected a philosophical language inaccessible to the masses, made its gods far away yet all too visible, built an ethics so easy to grasp (and caricature), claimed to illuminate everything with a shining light, advertised its distrust for social and political hierarchies: all this was ultimately too distant, both intellectually and emotionally, from the conception of the world that was Cicero's own.

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<sup>1</sup> Maso, Capire e dissentire. *Cicerone e la filosofia di Epicuro*, 31.

<sup>2</sup> Erler, *Epikur-Die Schule Epikurs-Lukrez*, 268–75.

<sup>3</sup> Sedley, "The Ethics of Brutus and Cassius."

<sup>4</sup> Michel, "L'épicurisme et la dialectique de Cicéron."

<sup>5</sup> On the problem of translation in Cicero see Lambardi, *Il Timaeus ciceroniano*; Dubuisson, "Le grec à Rome à l'époque de Cicéron"; Powell, *Cicero the Philosopher*.

<sup>6</sup> Lévy, *Cicero Academicus*.

<sup>7</sup> On this question see Mitsis, *Epicurus' Ethical Theory*, 11–58.

<sup>8</sup> Algra, "Chrysippus, Carneades, Cicero. The Ethical *divisiones* in Cicero's Lucullus."

<sup>9</sup> Lévy, “Cicéron et l’épicurisme: la problématique de l’éloge paradoxal.”

<sup>10</sup> Mitsis, “Epicurus on Friendship and Altruism,” 98–128 and [Chapter 10](#).

<sup>11</sup> For an enlightening synthesis of the problem of the concentric circles of sociability, see Radice, *Oikeiosis*.

<sup>12</sup> On Cicero’s itinerary between politics and philosophy, see Nicgorski, *Cicero’s Practical Philosophy*.

<sup>13</sup> Bellincioni, *Struttura e pensiero del Laelio ciceroniano*.

<sup>14</sup> Sharples, “Epicurus, Carneades and the Atomic Swerve”; Mitsis, *L’Éthique d’Épicure*.

<sup>15</sup> Obbink, “The Atheism of Epicurus” and “Le livre I du *De natura deorum* de Cicéron et le *De pietate* de Philodème.”

<sup>16</sup> Benferhat, *Ciues Epicurei. Les Épicuriens et l’idée de monarchie à Rome et en Italie de Sylla à Octave*.

<sup>17</sup> Görler, *Untersuchungen zu Cicero’s Philosophie*.

<sup>18</sup> Canfora, “La première réception de Lucrèce à Rome.”

<sup>19</sup> Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*.

<sup>20</sup> Brittain, *Philo of Larissa. The Last of the Academic Sceptics*; Sedley, *The Philosophy of Antiochus*.

<sup>21</sup> Nicgorski, *Cicero’s Practical Philosophy*.

## CHAPTER 19

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# SENECA AND EPICURUS

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MARGARET GRAVER

WITHIN the history of Epicurus's reception at Rome the figure of Seneca the Younger occupies a position of particular interest. Though not himself an Epicurean, Seneca is deeply engaged with Epicurean thought and Epicurean texts. In his prose writings he refers to Epicurus or to his doctrines and members of his community more than eighty times, giving over forty direct quotations from Epicurean works.<sup>1</sup> Yet his overall attitude is by no means easy to characterize. At times painstakingly accurate, he is also capable of what seems like willful misrepresentation of Epicurus's views; often antagonistic, he is also on occasion strikingly appreciative of what Epicurus has to offer. On some points he even takes over ideas which he knows to be Epicurean in origin, stating them as his own opinion. More than that, he will sometimes modify and develop those ideas in ways that make him a fascinating case of Epicurean influence outside the Garden.

The complexity of Seneca's response at one time made him the central exhibit for that older view of Roman philosophy that spoke of "eclecticism." Indeed, Pierluigi Donini has argued that the very notion of eclecticism as formulated by Eduard Zeller and Karl Praechter was devised in part as a way of accounting for Seneca's extraordinary attitude toward the rival school.<sup>2</sup> More recent scholarship has in general resisted the

implication that Seneca lacked a clear sense of doctrinal commitment. Following a seminal article by John Rist in 1989, numerous careful studies have demonstrated the depth of Seneca's familiarity with the Stoic system and the thoroughness of his adherence to it.<sup>3</sup> Yet this reassessment of the Roman philosopher's main doctrinal adherence has not as yet been followed by any thorough re-examination of the role of Epicureanism in his works.<sup>4</sup> A comprehensive review of the evidence is in order.

In what follows, I collect and study most of the relevant passages, not taking them chronologically but rather grouping them loosely by topic. In so doing I hope to bring out the thinking behind Seneca's response, which is more consistent and principled than has usually been recognized. Toward the core commitments of Epicurean philosophy—its anti-teleological physics and cosmology, its hedonist ethics, and its utilitarian approach to other-concern and friendship—Seneca is consistently hostile, as befits one whose instincts are those of a Stoic. He is careful, though, to identify some *de facto* common ground between the two schools on the question of whether philosophers should participate in politics or withdraw into a life of study and contemplation. Meanwhile he willingly endorses a number of points made by Epicurus concerning the psychology of the individual and the therapeutic strategies that are most likely to assist moral progress. However, this agreement does not ever carry with it any general approval of the *a priori* commitments of Epicureanism. It is rather a practical appreciation for Epicurus's sensitivity to the nuances of human behavior.

## EXTENT AND PROVENANCE OF SENECA'S KNOWLEDGE

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Seneca's familiarity with the Epicurean school and its doctrine was extensive and detailed. Although the nature of the evidence does not permit definitive identification of his specific sources, there is reason to think that his information was often better than our own and reliable enough to yield the basis for a sophisticated response.

Concerning Epicurus himself, Seneca knows that he lived in Athens and that his personal habits were abstemious (*Vita Beata* 12.4; *Ep.* 18.9). He is able to quote from Epicurus's letters concerning the character of his friends

Metrodorus, Polyaenus, Idomeneus, Pythocles, and Hermarchus, and can give a date for at least one such letter.<sup>5</sup> He knows, too, that these friends were philosophers in their own right, but he believes that their views were so close to those of Epicurus as to justify some casualness in attribution.<sup>6</sup> On the basis of a letter exchange with Metrodorus, he infers that Epicurus was little known during his lifetime (*Ep.* 79.15–16). He knows of Epicurus’s deathbed suffering from urinary blockage and dysentery and can quote his dying words (*Ep.* 66.47, 92.25).

In matters of doctrine he shows a broad understanding of Epicurean ethics in particular and refers often to such key elements as freedom from pain and anxiety, the classification of desires, the basis of friendship, the preference for a retired life, and the inter-entailment of virtue and pleasure. He can also state accurately many points from throughout the Epicurean system, among them the intermingling of atoms and void, the downward movement of atoms, arguments against the fear of death, the elimination of logic from the curriculum, the effort to eliminate ambiguous terms, and the use of the term “rule” (*kanōn*) for philosophical methodology.<sup>7</sup>

It is possible that some of this information came to him by oral transmission, for he has some Epicurean friends, among them his kinsman Annaeus Serenus and the elderly Aufidius Bassus of *Ep.* 30.<sup>8</sup> But he also speaks of reading Epicurean books, and although he does not mention the titles of these books, we can be confident that most of his knowledge has a textual basis. Determining what specific works he had on hand is more difficult, since many points of doctrine were stated in exactly the same words in more than one Epicurean text or were quoted or paraphrased in handbooks and in works by opponents of the school. In some cases the best we can do is to identify the works with which Seneca *appears* to be familiar when the doctrines he reports are compared with Epicurus’s extant writings. On this basis we can say that he appears to know the *Letter to Menoeceus*, because he quotes a phrase from *Ep. Men.* 130 in one of his letters and in another states Epicurus’s formula for the highest good in exactly the form that appears in *Ep. Men.* 131.<sup>9</sup> He also quotes the exact words that we know as the first, fourth, and fifth of the *Key Doctrines*—although again, the *Key Doctrines* may themselves have been excerpted from other Epicurean works, in which case Seneca may be quoting the originals.<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes, too, Seneca quotes from Epicurean texts with which we are not otherwise familiar. In the *Epistulae Morales*, especially, he is fond of quoting brief maxims from Epicurus's correspondence with friends, and many of these are from letters otherwise unknown to us. Five of Epicurus's letters are described at some length: the letter summarized in *Ep.* 9, criticizing Stilpo's view on friendship; the dated letter to Polyaenus cited in *Ep.* 18.9; the letter to Idomeneus on political participation quoted in 21 and 22; the one on moral progress quoted in 52.3–4, and the one described in 79.15 concerning his friendship with Metrodorus.<sup>11</sup> Seneca also knows at least three letters by Metrodorus, one of which he quotes at some length in Greek.<sup>12</sup> Since he also describes what it is like to select Epicurean maxims out of their original contexts (*Ep.* 33), it is likely that he possesses complete texts for other letters as well, and that at least some of the other short sayings quoted in the *Epistulae Morales* derive from this source. But he also must have access to some sort of *gnomologion* or maxim collection, for at one point he indicates that he is quoting from “the less well-known, uncirculated sayings of Epicurus” (*secretior nec inter vulgata Epicuri dicta*, *Ep.* 13.17).<sup>13</sup>

Could the wealthy Seneca have possessed a large collection of Epicurean writings? His description of a work authored by his friend Lucilius seems relevant in this regard, where he says “it seemed light to me, though its bulk would seem at first glance to be that of Livy or Epicurus, not of your writings or mine” (*Ep.* 46.1). This remark suggests that he at least knows Epicurus's corpus to be of substantial length, comparable to Livy's multi-volume histories and certainly more extensive than Seneca's own writings. If he did have access to some substantial work—a long epitome or perhaps even *On Nature* itself, then we have an explanation for an unexpected citation of Epicurus in his meteorological treatise, the *Natural Questions*. Explaining various theories for the causes of earthquakes, Seneca quotes a long series of explanations in what he says are Epicurus's own words, explanations similar but by no means identical to the ones we find in *Letter to Pythocles* 105.<sup>14</sup> In addition, we might ask ourselves how he knows that the Epicurean gods inhabit the spaces between the worlds, a view not to be found in Epicurus's writings as we know them, although Cicero, too, associates it with the school.<sup>15</sup> Such information could perhaps have come from *On Nature* (if the view was indeed

Epicurus's own), but alternative explanations are certainly available, including that Seneca sometimes repeats Epicurean doctrines or even entire quotations that he found in intervening works. For the citation in *Natural Questions*, for instance, he may have drawn on criticisms of Epicurus contained in the meteorological compendium by Posidonius.<sup>16</sup>

Well informed as Seneca may be on some points, there are also some aspects of Epicureanism which he gives no indication of having studied. We find no mention in his works of the conservation of matter, atomic shapes, or the atomic “swerve”; no specifics on the composition of the soul; nothing on *eidola*, sense-perception, or the validity of the senses; nothing on the origin of species, the development of civilization, or social contracts. Yet his failure to mention these points does not necessarily indicate ignorance. All of them are treated by Lucretius, whom he seems to know well, since he quotes him eight or nine times from widely scattered contexts. Perhaps Seneca regarded these more abstract and theoretical dimensions of Epicureanism as too far distant from his own concerns to be worth explaining to his readers.

## PHYSICS AND THEOLOGY

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Although his works contain no systematic treatment of Epicurean physics, Seneca does state a definitive position on atomism in *Natural Questions* 2.6–7, speaking about the physical properties of air. Before giving his own explanation of the causes of lightning and thunder, he finds it necessary to establish that air is a unitary body, and in order to do that, he must first dismiss the rival claim that air is composed “from discrete little bodies” or “particles” mingled with void. Those who defend this claim believe that it is proven by the ease with which motion occurs in air. But this is incorrect: motion in air, like motion in water, is enabled by *antiperistasis*, the retrograde flow that closes in behind a moving object.<sup>17</sup> In fact observation tells us that air must be a unified substance, since without unity and coherence it could not exhibit the “tension” (*intentio*) that is manifested in the various phenomena of air pressure: inflated balls, windstorms, trumpets, and the hydraulic organ. The operation of “breath in tension” (*intenti spiritus*) explains a vast range of phenomena, from stone walls broken up



by roots to the cohesion and movement of the human body, and even the movements of the mind. Without it, Seneca insists, there could be nothing strong, and its own strength surpasses everything else.

Although Seneca does not name Epicurus specifically in the passage, the attitude he takes toward particulate air is significant for his reception of Epicurean thought. His own understanding of the world depends on there being a unified nexus of causality effected through the medium of *pneuma*—for his “breath in tension” is manifestly the same as the all-pervasive *pneumatikē tonos* that effects all causation in standard Stoic physics. A view which dissolves physical nature into particles interspersed with void is irreconcilably at odds with his and must be resisted at every turn. In a similar vein, he consistently expresses strong objections to the Epicurean theology that denies god or the gods any causal involvement with the world. For him as for other Stoics, god or Zeus is identical with the causal principle: he is “the intellect of the universe ... everything you see, and everything you do not see,” who “maintains his creation both from within and from without” (*NQ* 1 *pref.* 13). To place the gods outside the world makes them lazy rather than blessed (*Ben.* 7.31.3, cf. 4.4.1), and leaves the world without a controlling intelligence: events in it will come about “by some kind of random impulse or by a nature that has no awareness of its own actions” (*NQ* 1 *pref.* 15).

Seneca recognizes that Epicurean theology is meant to remove the fear of divinities; in fact he agrees with Epicurus that an important function of natural science is to rid oneself of superstition (*NQ* 6.3). But he feels that freedom of anxiety comes at too high a price when god’s beneficence is eliminated along the way.<sup>18</sup> In *De beneficiis* 4.19, he satirizes the Epicurean position on the divine nature:

For your part, Epicurus, you make god weaponless. You have taken away all his thunderbolts, all his power, and to make sure that no one needs to fear him, you have thrown him out of the world entirely. Hence you have no reason to fear this deity, given that he is shut out by a huge and insuperable wall and barred from mortal contact and mortal sight. He does not have the wherewithal to bless or to harm us. Stranded in that space between this and another sky, with no living being, no humans, no possessions, he is dodging the debris of worlds collapsing above and all around him, and does not hear our prayers or care for us at all.<sup>19</sup>

Because this powerless Epicurean god has not conferred any benefits on human beings, who according to Epicurus are only “a fortuitous

conglomeration of atoms and those motes you speak of,” there is no reason for anyone to feel gratitude or reverence toward the divine. Seneca knows that Epicureans recommend such attitudes, mentioning god’s “surpassing majesty and unique nature” (*Ben.* 4.19.4). But he argues that such non-utilitarian worship would only make sense if it came from philosophers who hold that honorable conduct is choiceworthy in its own right.

## VIRTUE AND PLEASURE

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Seneca’s response to the core positions of Epicurean ethics is of a piece with the cosmological and theological postulates just described. In Book 4 of *De beneficiis* and also in the short essay *De vita beata*, he distinguishes sharply between his own views and those of Epicurus, stating as usual his adherence to the Stoic position that virtue alone is the human good. To the hedonist’s essential postulate that pleasure is the goal of all rational behavior he is unremittingly hostile: it is “putting the highest good in the belly,” “coupling things that are opposites,” i.e. virtue and pleasure, and “making virtue the handmaid of pleasure” (*Vita beata* 7.1, 7.3, 13.5). On this point his tone tends to be sharply polemical (*Ben.* 4.2.1):

Here we have a quarrel with the Epicureans, a pampered, shade-dwelling crowd of party-time philosophers. For them, virtue is the instrument of their pleasures: it obeys them, is their slave, is subject to them.

Likewise he complains, playing on the gender stereotypes of the Roman elite, that the Epicurean notion of the highest good is “effeminate” and Epicurean sayings typically unmanly (*Ben.* 4.2.4, *Const. Sap.* 14.5). All the same, he understands quite well that Epicurus is not a mere devotee of pleasure as commonly understood. Although his criticisms are sometimes aggressively phrased, he credits Epicurus with a serious position in ethics, and his objections are properly philosophical ones. When he grants that the “pleasure of Epicurus” is in reality “sober and austere,” he is referring in part to the personal habits of Epicurus himself, but also more generally to the style of life recommended by Epicurean teaching, which is “chaste, upright, and if you look closely, severe.”<sup>20</sup>

The problem he sees is that even if serious adherents of Epicurus's teachings do maintain an austere style of life, there are many who will be led astray by their talk of pleasure to believe that philosophy sometimes gives license to indiscriminate pleasure-seeking. Concern over this perception motivates him to polemicize in spite of what he knows of the actual style of living within the Garden. His real target is the licentiousness that results from a mistaken impression of Epicurean ethics—an impression which he faults the Epicureans themselves for creating. "This is why it is harmful to praise pleasure in the way that you do," he writes. "What is honorable in your teaching is kept hidden; what corrupts is in plain sight" (*Vita beata* 12.5). In mocking tones, he satirizes the philosopher who would attract converts in that way (*Vita beata* 13.3):

The very appearance of it gives credence to its reputation and rouses disreputable expectations. You are like a strong man wearing a dress: your chastity is intact, your manliness is unimpaired, your body is not exposed to any scandalous advances, but in your hand is a tambourine! So let them choose a more honorable placard; let the writing above their door arouse our courage. The one that is there has been an invitation to the vices.

Elsewhere he imagines the discomfiture of one who enters the Garden after being attracted by the sign above the door, "Here, Guest, will you be well entertained: here pleasure is the highest good"—only to be received with "a plate of porridge and a generous goblet of water" (*Ep.* 21.10). Again, the situation is comical; nonetheless the sign ought to be changed.

At the theoretical level, Seneca is familiar with the basis of Epicurean asceticism in the hedonic calculus and in *Key Doctrine* 5, of which he gives a Latin version (*Vita beata* 7.1):

It is not possible for pleasure to be separated from virtue ... no one lives honorably without living pleasurably, nor pleasurably without also living honorably.

He recognizes that this doctrine makes virtue a necessary condition for pleasure and can cite at least two Epicurean arguments in support of this claim: that intelligent management (i.e. the virtue of prudence) is needed if one is to maximize one's pleasure over time, and that those who devote themselves unreservedly to the pleasures of the flesh necessarily suffer mental turmoil (*Vita beata* 10.2, 12.1). Elsewhere he admits, again apparently on the basis of *Key Doctrine* 5, that for Epicurus anyone who is virtuous will also have pleasure (*Ep.* 85.18).<sup>21</sup> He knows, too, that

Epicureans emphasize mental pleasures, specifically those of memory and expectation (*Vita beata* 6.1, 10.2).

But from a Stoic perspective none of this is enough. Virtue cannot play an instrumental role, for the meaning of virtuous conduct changes if one behaves prudently or temperately in order to gain some further reward. Nor is it satisfactory to say that virtue is both necessary and sufficient for a pleasurable life. For the Stoic, virtue, not pleasure, must be the very thing that makes life good. This is not to say that a life of virtue needs to be disagreeable, since Seneca and his Epicurean interlocutor both hold that engaging in virtuous conduct brings pleasure to oneself. For Seneca, however, as for the early Stoics, such pleasure is not what motivates the virtuous person; instead, it is a by-product (*accessio*), like the poppies that grow around the edges of a cultivated field.<sup>22</sup> The true reward for virtuous conduct is the fact that one is behaving virtuously. “The highest good is in the capacity for judgment and in the character of the optimal mind” (*Vita beata* 9.3). As for the Epicurean emphasis on mental pleasures, it is not specific enough to identify the form of pleasure that a virtuous person can legitimately experience. For mental pleasures can also consist in such discreditable feelings as “the thrill of being superior to others” or “arrogance that delights in insults.”<sup>23</sup>

Seneca takes a similarly strong position on Epicurus’s general approach to justice and other-concern. He does not accept the claim of *KD* 31 that the justice of nature is nothing other than the pledge of reciprocal utility. As he understands it, Epicurus is merely denying that there is any such thing as what is just by nature (*Ep.* 97.15). He is aware that Epicureans give consequentialist arguments to support some forms of service to others, but he does not believe that a genuinely virtuous agent would be motivated in this way. Just as the gods cannot truly confer benefits unless beneficence is choiceworthy in itself, so human beings are not really behaving virtuously when they have ulterior motives (*Ben.* 4.3). Naturally the Epicurean will deny that the gods are beneficent, but the argument from common conceptions will refute him, for people of all nations feel gratitude toward the gods (*Ben.* 4.4).<sup>24</sup>

He complains also about the Epicurean position on friendship. Unlike Cicero in *De finibus* 1.69, Seneca does not recognize any basis in Epicureanism for disinterested friendship. In his most extensive treatment

of the subject in *Ep.* 9, he speaks only of amicable behavior which promotes the agent's material interests via reciprocity. On his understanding the Epicurean values having friends merely "to have someone to sit beside him in illness, or to assist him in imprisonment or in need" (*Ep.* 9.8). By contrast, the Stoic wise person cherishes friends as a means of exercising the virtues (*Ep.* 9.10):

"Why make a friend?" To have someone I can die for, someone I can accompany into exile, someone whose life I can save, even by laying down my own. What you describe is a business deal, not a friendship, for it looks to its own advantage; it thinks in terms of results.

Seneca would be "talking like an Epicurean" if he were to say that the interests of two friends could ever be fundamentally at odds (*Ep.* 48.2). His own view is exactly the opposite: friendship requires each of the friends to live for the other in everything, in a commonalty (*consortium rerum omnium*) that is grounded in the bond shared among all human beings. "For he who has much in common with a fellow human will have everything in common with his friend" (*Ep.* 48.3).

On all these doctrinal points Seneca expresses sharp disagreement with Epicurean views, and with good reason, for the theoretical commitments he adopts in calling himself a Stoic are indeed fundamentally opposed to the main assumptions of Epicurean ethics. On those few occasions when he finds himself in agreement with Epicurus on a philosophical doctrine with this kind of centrality, he draws attention to the point as an *a fortiori* argument for the rightness of the Stoic view. If even Epicurus, who "indulged the body the most," believes that the blessedness of the wise is unimpaired by bodily pain, then the Stoics are all the more likely to be correct on that point.<sup>25</sup> In a more intricate example, Epicurus is invoked in *Ep.* 66.45–46 to support a difficult Stoic case for the equality of all goods. The Stoic position is that all goods must be of equal magnitude because only virtues and virtuous activities are good, and virtue does not vary in degree. The claim is counterintuitive, but it turns out that Epicurus too is committed to it, since Epicurus's "highest and happiest good" consists in freedom from pain in the body and freedom from disturbance in the mind, and these conditions, once fulfilled, cannot be increased in degree any more than the Stoic goods can.<sup>26</sup> Evidently Seneca has in mind *Key Doctrines* 18–20, concerning the limits of pleasure, as well as the famous deathbed letter, which he goes on to discuss. But while he has reflected on these

Epicurean texts, his way of using them runs exactly counter to Epicurean hedonism (*Const. Sap.* 16.1, *Ep.* 92.25–6).

## LEISURE AND CONTEMPLATION

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The value the Stoic finds in service to others can also be expressed as an admonition to political involvement, in opposition to the Epicurean maxim “live unknown.” Seneca regards quietism as a hallmark of the school (“to rest with Epicurus,” *Brevitate vitae* 14.2) and in some contexts he expresses strong objections to it. In his view, Epicureans’ idea of pleasure is “to give the body to sloth” and “hide out in the shade”; a typical Epicurean “praises civic repose while living amid songs and parties”; living in retirement is “lowering yourself to Epicurean maxims.”<sup>27</sup> There is nothing inherently valuable in repose:

I will never call freedom from pain a good: a cicada has that, and so does a flea. I will not even say that a quiet, untroubled existence is a good: what is more leisurely than a worm?<sup>28</sup>

The issue of leisure is not straightforward, however, for Stoic philosophers, too, abandon the rigors of political action in order to pursue the activities they like best, namely study, discussion, and writing. Indeed it is not easy to see how one can be a philosopher at all without secluding oneself to some extent from the demands of public service, and Seneca, being a veteran of the imperial administration, fully appreciates what the *bios theōrētikos* has to offer him.

In the brief essay *De otio*, he does what he can to resolve the tension in his own position. He admits right away that advocating a life of study seems like “preaching the doctrines of Epicureanism” (*De otio* 1.4). But while Stoics favor a life of action, they can also supply various justifications for a philosophical retreat. For instance, one may have some chronic illness, or one may live in a state that is too corrupt to benefit from one’s endeavors. Essentially, the Stoic is obligated to serve the public “unless there is some obstacle” (*nisi si quid impedit*) while the Epicurean is encouraged to refrain “unless some need arises” (*nisi si quid intervenerit*, *De otio* 3.2–3). The kinds of needs that would impel an Epicurean into the public sphere would presumably be utilitarian ones, for Seneca comments

lower down that Epicurus's hedonic calculus commits him to action in some instances (*De otio* 7.2–4). He thus claims to find some common ground between the schools. But this is without minimizing the differences between them. Epicureanism is still subject to “the implacable hatred we have decreed toward those whose ends differ from ours” (*De otio* 7.4, 7.1). If the positions overlap it is only because each side allows for exceptions to its injunction.

We find a deeper exploration of the tensions concerning leisure and contemplation in the *Epistulae Morales*. From the very beginning of the collection Seneca repeatedly urges his friend to retire from his career in public service, withdraw from all society, and devote himself to a life of study and reflection. In brief, Lucilius should imitate Seneca himself and “spend life in obscurity” (*vitam per obscurum transmittere*, *Ep.* 19.3). Such advice is admittedly at odds with the Stoic injunction to remain active throughout life (*Ep.* 8.1, 68.2), and Seneca actually draws attention to the parallel with the Epicurean *λάθῃ βιώσας* (*Ep.* 22.5–6). Yet he also insists that a philosophical retirement is in accordance with Stoic ethics as a whole—provided one's leisure is put to good use. In justification he invokes an argument mentioned only briefly in *De otio*: that writing and study may itself be a form of public service if it enables others to improve themselves. In such cases, one is denying one's services to the local community in order to provide them to the greater community of humankind. Again, his view coincides only superficially with that of Epicurus.

## MAXIMS AND MEDITATION

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These same reflections provide a motivation for a remarkable form of interaction with Epicurus and his school that takes place throughout the first three books of the *Epistulae Morales*. Very near the beginning of the correspondence, Seneca instructs Lucilius in the manner of reading that will best promote his progress toward wisdom. One should not range widely through large numbers of books, he says, but instead concentrate on just a few, extracting from them every day some useful precept to memorize and ponder at length. To illustrate, he offers an extract from his own reading in an unspecified text by Epicurus (*Ep.* 2.5–6):



Today it is this, which I found in Epicurus—for it is my custom to cross even into the other camp, not as a deserter but as a spy: “Cheerful poverty is an honorable thing.” Indeed, it is not poverty if it is cheerful ...

Several sentences of reflection follow, as Seneca ponders the implications of the phrase “happy poverty” and the advantages of restricting one’s desires. Thus begins a regular practice of closing each letter with an excerpt “from today’s reading” (*Ep.* 4.10), taken usually from the works of Epicurus, although Metrodorus is also mentioned as a source (*Ep.* 14.17, 15.9), and other philosophers and poets occasionally play that role as well.

In giving Epicurus pride of place among his sources of memorable maxims, Seneca is not declaring any new philosophical allegiance.<sup>29</sup> On the contrary, he seems to savor the irony of a Stoic author’s finding something of value in this unlikely source, crossing “into the enemy camp.” When he cites Epicurus, he is taking “another’s material,” and if anyone should challenge his right to use the material, he can reply that it is “public property” (*Ep.* 14.17, 21.9; cf. *Ep.* 12.11). And indeed the extracts he chooses are never very distinctive in terms of their philosophical content. Like the example above, they represent the blandest sort of admonition to restrict desire, avoid the crowd, and overcome the fear of death. Each is accompanied by a few sentences of interpretation aimed not so much at divining the author’s original intent as at finding some worthwhile application to ordinary lives.<sup>30</sup>

Nor can the preponderance of Epicurean authors be ascribed to Epicurean leanings on the part of Lucilius, as has sometimes been inferred.<sup>31</sup> Lucilius is never represented in the *Epistulae Morales* or elsewhere as holding any Epicurean beliefs; his commitments are rather to his career in government, to his literary projects and, increasingly as the letters proceed, to Stoicism. The two remarks that give Lucilius a proprietary interest in Epicurus (“you may complain” in *Ep.* 20.9 and “your Epicurus” in *Ep.* 23.9) should instead be recognized as part of a pattern of playful utterance that Seneca develops in connection with the excerpted maxims. Seneca begins early on to speak of the quotations from Epicurus and others as a kind of commodity, a “payment” or “little gift” enclosed with each letter, a “present from Greece.”<sup>32</sup> Lucilius is soon coopted into the game, represented reaching out his hand for the “daily dole” (*Ep.* 15.17) or demanding, “Pay what you owe!” (18.14). To pay him, Seneca must “get

a loan from Epicurus” (*Ep.* 17.11). Hence whatever Seneca might find in Epicurus’ writings is already by implication owed to Lucilius: “you know whose money-box I use” (*Ep.* 26.8). When Seneca speaks of “your Epicurus,” then, he is referring to his adherent’s expected “gift,” not to his supposed philosophical adherence.<sup>33</sup>

The role given to Epicurus in the early books of the *Epistulae Morales* probably has something to do with Seneca’s literary ambitions for his work, for the collected letters of Epicurus were by this time a classic of philosophical writing which he might well wish to emulate.<sup>34</sup> In Letter 21, he draws a striking parallel between his own admonitions to Lucilius and those of Epicurus to Idomeneus: in both cases, the addressee is to be made famous not by his achievements in politics but by his role as addressee of a work of philosophical literature. Comparisons are also made to the letters of Cicero and to Vergil’s *Aeneid*—names that speak volumes about Seneca’s perception of Epicurus’s status as a writer. As Brad Inwood has noted, the Epicurean letters known to Seneca may have been different in style from the three letters we have extant today: more personal in tone, less technical and less difficult to construe.<sup>35</sup> Seneca may well have found in them an important model for his own project in philosophical letter-writing.

For the specific association between Epicurus and philosophical maxims there is a further explanation that can be offered. This was adumbrated already by Miriam Griffin, who refers Seneca’s use and occasional misuse of Epicurus to the Epicureans’ own practice of memorizing and reflecting on brief summaries of doctrine.<sup>36</sup> Seneca recognizes in Epicurus a skillful handler of written texts as a vehicle for philosophical training and seeks to appropriate some of those techniques for his own program of written therapy. Epicurus’s interest in providing short, easily memorized texts is explained in *Ep. Hdt.* 83 and evidenced especially in the *Key Doctrines*, which whether or not they were compiled by Epicurus himself were certainly circulated as his from an early date.<sup>37</sup> The *Letter to Menoeceus*, in addition to its summary of ethical teachings, offers explicit instruction on how one is to assimilate the material. One is to memorize, but also to “reason out” and “accustom oneself to believing” each point; then at the end, to “rehearse these and the related points day and night, with yourself and with a person like yourself” (*Ep. Men.* 135). To Seneca, who spent much of his life as a teacher of oratory, the instruction to “rehearse”

(μελετᾶν) would suggest the process of rehearsing before delivering a speech—not memorization as we think of it, but mulling over one point at a time so as to be ready to deliver them when the time comes. Seneca’s frequent quotations from Epicurus may be meant to recall this characteristically Epicurean way of reforming a person’s character through meditation on brief ethical *sententiae*. Their significance is procedural, not doctrinal.

Seneca clarifies his intentions concerning the use of maxims in philosophical instruction in Letter 33, after giving over his previous practice. Although in the preceding letters he had sometimes provided excerpts from authors who were not Epicureans, he now makes the philosophical maxim the basis of a contrast between Epicurean and Stoic authors. While not voicing any objections to Epicurean texts in terms of content, he remarks that they are more easily excerptable just because their mode of expression is less tightly structured than Stoic texts (*Ep.* 33.3–5). He then aligns this difference of style with a difference in attitude toward philosophical study. The Epicurean assumption, he says, is that the learner will be subservient to the authority of Epicurus, while Stoic texts require more intellectual independence. The latter are thus more suitable for advanced students, the former only for beginners. However Seneca does not definitively reject the model of therapeutic reading he has built up in relation to Epicurean texts; he does promise to send “by the fistful” the extracts Lucilius requests (33.6), and he wants these to be read with the kind of thoughtful intensity these early letters have demonstrated. But he seeks now to dissociate that procedure from Epicureanism, and at the same to add to it a new dimension of critical assessment and reasoning. The entire sequence, from Letter 2 through Letter 33, thus becomes an exercise in creative adaptation at the level of literary form. Seneca appreciates the psychological efficacy of the reading method promoted by Epicurus and by the form of Epicurean texts, but he also means to alter that method to suit his rather different therapeutic objectives.

## HUMAN NATURE AND THE TACTICS OF THE THERAPIST

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We have seen that Seneca's usual hostility to the main principles of Epicurean thought does not prevent him from showing appreciation for the brief, memorable maxims he finds in Epicurean texts and for the practice of meditative reading Epicurus recommends. I now consider a series of passages in which Seneca expresses respect for Epicurus's psychological insight and for the practical efficacy to some of his arguments in managing desire, fear, anxiety, and grief. In some instances, he even goes so far as to endorse an Epicurean claim, taking it on board for his own project in advancing Lucilius and other readers toward Stoic wisdom. He can do this without conflict, since the points in question are not core philosophical commitments so much as empirically developed observations of how minds operate. In essence, he treats these Epicurean assertions as describing real psychological phenomena that any philosophical system would need to account for.

A particularly clear-cut example is his treatment of the fear of penalties in Letter 97. Commenting that it is elegantly phrased, Seneca gives his endorsement to Epicurus's view that wrongdoers inevitably experience anxiety about possible punishment, even if they have escaped thus far. However he does not agree with the role that wrongdoer anxiety plays in Epicurean ethics as the principal penalty for unjust conduct. For him, an intelligent agent does not refrain from harming others merely because he wants to avoid subsequent anxiety, but rather because the act is inherently wrong: *sceleris in scelere supplicium est* (*Ep.* 97.14). Still, the criminal's anxiety can be a secondary penalty, and the Stoic need not liberate him from that. Indeed, the persistence of this anxiety tells in favor of the Stoic view that justice exists in nature (*Ep.* 97.16):

We should disagree with Epicurus when he says that there is nothing that is just by nature, and that the reason one should refrain from misdeeds is that one cannot avoid the anxiety resulting from them; we should agree with him, though, that the wrongdoer is tormented by conscience and that his worst penalty is to bear the hounding and the lash of constant worry, because he cannot trust those who guarantee him security. This is proof in itself, Epicurus, that we have a natural horror of misdeeds: every criminal is afraid, even in a place of safety. Fortune exempts many from punishment, but none from anxiety. Why, if not because we have an innate aversion to what nature has condemned?<sup>38</sup>

Confident that the point is adaptable to a Stoic ethical framework, Seneca proceeds in Letter 105 to repeat the Epicurean claim as an assertion by his own authorial voice (*Ep.* 105.7–8):

Anyone expecting punishment undergoes punishment, and anyone who deserves it expects it. Safety is compatible with a bad conscience, but security is not... . The wrongdoer sometimes has the chance of concealment, but never the confidence of it.

Given the similarity in wording, Seneca can hardly be unaware of Epicurus's influence in this second passage.<sup>39</sup> Clearly, though, he is not committing himself to Epicurean consequentialism. His borrowing is of the psychological observation only.

A similar progression can be observed in some of his remarks on the fear of death and pain. While he cares nothing for the "Epicurean song" that is supposed to address fears of eternal torment in Tartarus (*Ep.* 24.18), he does want to address the more elemental fear of death, and for this he finds some efficacy in the usual Epicurean arguments. In Letter 30, he recounts a conversation with an elderly Epicurean named Aufidius Bassus, who he says is facing the approach of death with enviable tranquility. Giving his own version of Bassus's words, he reports a series of arguments that run parallel to those in the *Letter to Menoeceus* and in Book 3 of Lucretius: that it is foolish to fear what you will not be present to experience, that nature reshuffles and reuses our components, though without any continued consciousness on our part, that the sated diner is content to leave the banquet.<sup>40</sup> Bassus refers also to Epicurus's principal defense against the fear of pain in *Key Doctrine 4* (*Ep.* 30.14):

In fact he used to say, in conformity with Epicurus's teachings, "First of all, I hope there will be no pain in that last breath; but if there is, it will be short, and that itself is some comfort. For severe pain is never of long duration. But if there is torment in the moment when mind separates from body, I will console myself thus: after that pain, I can no longer experience pain."

These are not the arguments given by Stoics against the fear of death; those are rather that neither death nor pain makes any difference to the human good, which has to be conceived of solely in terms of human excellence. But Seneca can reasonably claim that the Epicurean arguments can be adopted by a Stoic without creating any complications for his own doctrinal position. He does not himself hold any strong views on what happens to any given person's soul at the time of death. He is not committed to the Epicurean position on the extinction of consciousness, but he is open to it as one alternative. "Death either consumes us or sets us free. If we are released, then better things await us once our burden is removed; if we are

consumed, then nothing is waiting for us at all: both goods and evils are gone.”<sup>41</sup> Consequently he is quite willing to state the Epicurean arguments elsewhere as his own opinion. Shortly after the Bassus letter, we find him giving in his own voice the argument from *Letter to Menoeceus* 125: “Death holds no disadvantage, for a disadvantage must be that of some existing person.”<sup>42</sup> Not long afterward, in *Ep.* 54.4–5, he supplies a fairly exact version of Lucretius’s symmetry argument, applying it to his own situation. Similarly, he makes frequent use of *Key Doctrine* 4 on the endurance of pain, quoting it as if it were part of Stoicism in *Epp.* 24.14, 78.17, and 94.7.

Concerning pain, he is also familiar with a second Epicurean claim: that in times of bodily pain, one can maintain one’s state of blessedness by directing one’s attention away from one’s present sufferings toward good things one has experienced in the past. Although this approach to pain is not directly attested in the extant writings of Epicurus, Seneca’s version of it closely resembles a report by Cicero in *Tusculan Disputations* 3.32–33.<sup>43</sup> We find Seneca’s version in *Letter* 78.18, immediately following a paraphrase of *Key Doctrine* 4, where he says, “it will also be beneficial to depart mentally from the pain and turn your mind toward other thoughts.” This should be compared with Cicero’s report, where the Epicurean recommendation has the same two components: “distracting the mind from the thought of suffering, and redirecting it to the contemplation of pleasures.” At the same time, though, the specific ways Seneca suggests manipulating one’s attention are distinctly different from what we know or can infer for Epicurus. Epicurus, naturally, has in mind directing one’s thoughts toward remembered pleasures, which might be mental pleasures such as the memory of philosophical discussions with friends.<sup>44</sup> Seneca’s suggestion is different (*Ep.* 78.18):

Think of honorable deeds, brave deeds you have performed; reflect on what is good in your character. Let your memory range over everything you have most admired. Then bring to mind some great example of courage and victory over pain.

Moreover, Epicurus specifically denies that one should try to anticipate future pain or distress, and this is the position we should expect him to take, since doing so would increase our psychological distress over time.<sup>45</sup>

Seneca, however, frequently recommends such “pre-rehearsal of future ills” as a way of preparing oneself to face trials with fortitude (*Ep.* 24.2):

Fix your mind on whatever it is that you are afraid might happen as a thing that definitely will happen. Whatever bad event that might be, take the measure of it mentally and so assess your fear.

Once again he is willing to take on an Epicurean technique that he believes can be efficacious, but is unconcerned with closely related elements in Epicurus’s system of thought.

Other examples can be given. Seneca agrees with Epicurus that it is beneficial to remind the one making progress in philosophy that there is a natural limit to the pleasure that can be derived from eating and drinking (*Ep. Men.* 127–8, *KD* 21). The point appears already among the maxims provided for Lucilius in the early letters and resurfaces frequently thereafter, even as late as *Ep.* 119.5–7, where a direct quotation confirms that Seneca still has in mind the Epicurean origins of the thought.<sup>46</sup> He also recommends several of Epicurus’s practical expedients for improving one’s moral character, such as restricting one’s diet on specified days (*Ep.* 18.9) or visualizing some good person as a constant spectator for one’s actions (*Epp.* 11.8–9, 25.4–5). He also cites with approval Epicurus’s classification of students into those who make good progress in philosophy without aid, those like Metrodorus who easily follow where another leads, and those like Hermarchus who need to be driven and compelled to do the right thing (*Ep.* 52.3–4). In all these cases, he follows Epicurus out of respect for his sensitivity to the ins and outs of human nature, believing that his observations are grounded in real phenomena of human experience which a Stoic therapist ought likewise to consider.

Correspondingly, Seneca will sometimes reject an Epicurean claim on grounds that it lacks a sound observational basis. Like Cicero in *Tusculan Disputations* 2.17, he understands Epicurus to have said that a wise person under severe torture is able not only to maintain a state of blessedness but actually to derive pleasure from the experience: when roasted in the bull of Phalaris, he will say “It is pleasant; it does not matter to me at all” (*Ep.* 66.18).<sup>47</sup> This claim he rejects indignantly; he finds it psychologically implausible and philosophically problematic, since it suggests that wisdom not only perfects but actually alters human nature. Similarly, in a discussion



of grief and consolation, he takes exception to a claim he finds in a letter of Metrodorus, “that there is a pleasure which is akin to sorrow and that in situations like this one should try to catch that pleasure” (*Ep.* 99.25).<sup>48</sup> As Seneca understands it, the consolation Metrodorus offers is not the usual Epicurean recommendation for neutralizing mental pain by diverting one’s attention or by finding compensatory sources of pleasure. Rather it is a novel form of pleasure derived from the experience of grief itself: it comes “in the very midst of grief—indeed, through grief” (*in ipso luctu voluptatem, immo per luctum*) and to pursue it is “to try to snare a pleasure right in the midst of grief” (*voluptatem in ipso dolore aucupari*).<sup>49</sup> Again, the Stoic author rejects the claim, not only because he finds it morally reprehensible but because he denies its empirical basis: it is “hard to believe” (*Ep.* 99.26). In both instances, reflection on the Epicurean inheritance proves valuable to Seneca primarily in helping him clarify his formulation of the Stoic position on the impassivity of the wise person under conditions of physical pain or personal bereavement. The aim is not strictly polemical; rather it is to make clear that Stoic *apatheia* does not alter or eliminate any essential capacity of the human being.

Epicureanism is itself a complex body of doctrines, techniques, and practices, and Seneca’s response to it over more than a decade of philosophical study and writing necessarily takes many forms. Yet when we consider his reactions across the board, a definite pattern does emerge. Seneca has thoroughly internalized the principles of Stoicism, and wherever he deals with the main elements of Epicurus’s philosophy, he finds himself in disagreement with them for reasons he can explain. At times, he takes a strongly polemical tone, seeking to dissuade his contemporaries from the libertinism and nihilism for which members of the Roman elite sometimes used Epicureanism as a pretext. In so doing he speaks out of conviction, not out of partisanship, for just as he will sometimes reject views offered by Stoic authors that he deems inconsistent with Stoic foundations, so also he adopts certain elements of Epicurean thought as his own when he thinks there is no inconsistency. That these adopted elements are invariably matters of psychological insight and therapeutic practice will serve to indicate the level at which he was impressed and inspired by Epicurus’s achievement.

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<sup>1</sup> A full list of references is provided in Ferguson, "Epicureanism under the Roman Empire," 2280–82; most can also be found grouped by topic in Motto, *Seneca Sourcebook*. Lana, "Le 'Lettere a Lucilio' nella letteratura epistolare," 263–68 compares the citations from Epicurus with those from other authors.

<sup>2</sup> See Donini, "The History of the Concept of Eclecticism," 204. Donini remarks further on how exceptional it was for any major thinker of the Hellenistic period to be influenced by Epicurus: Seneca, he says, was "a completely peculiar and isolated instance" (209).

<sup>3</sup> Seneca's orthodoxy on the main outlines of Stoic doctrine was established in Rist, "Seneca and Stoic Orthodoxy"; the argument has been extended in Cooper, "Moral Theory and Moral Improvement: Seneca"; Inwood, *Reading Seneca*, 23–64, 132–57; Wildberger, *Seneca und die Stoa*; Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 125–32.

<sup>4</sup> The problem is scarcely mentioned, for instance, in the compendious Damschen and Heil, *Brill's Companion to Seneca*. Earlier comprehensive treatments include Setaioli, *Seneca e i Greci*, 172–248; André, "Sénèque et l'Epicurisme: ultime position"; Schottländer, "Epikureisches bei Seneca"; Mutschmann, "Seneca und Epikur." Some aspects are usefully explored in Wildberger, "The Epicurus Trope"; and also in Schiesaro, "Seneca and Epicurus: The Allure of the Other" (both of which appeared after the project undertaken here was substantially complete). My own study published in 2015 (Graver, "The Emotional Intelligence of Epicureans") overlaps in part with my treatment here, but is less comprehensive, concentrating on Epicurean elements in the *Letters*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ep.* 18.9, 21.3–5, 21.7, 22.5, 52.3–4, 79.15–16. The date given in *Ep.* 18.9 to “the magistracy [i.e. archonship] of Charinus” was probably copied from the superscription in his source.

<sup>6</sup> *Ep.* 14.17, 33.4, 81.11–12, 98.9.

<sup>7</sup> On downward movement see *Ep.* 72.9 (as a satiric comparison); on logic, ambiguity, and the *kanōn*, *Ep.* 89.11 and see Atherton, “Epicurean Philosophy of Language,” 212. The other points are all treated below.

<sup>8</sup> Serenus’s allegiance seems clear in *Const. sap.* 3.2 and 15.4, but in *Tranq. an.* 1.10 he has abandoned the school in favor of Stoicism: Griffin, *Seneca*, 316.

<sup>9</sup> *Ep.* 14.17, 66.45. Note, however, that in *Ep.* 14.17 he claims not to know whether the words he quotes are by Epicurus or by another of his school, evidence perhaps that his knowledge of the *Letter to Menoeceus* comes only through a *gnomologion*: Setaioli, *Seneca e i Greci*, 184–88.

<sup>10</sup> What look like exact quotations from the *Key Doctrines* are found at *Apoc.* 8 (*KD* 1), *Ep.* 30.14 (*KD* 4), and *Vita beata* 7.1 (*KD* 5).

<sup>11</sup> Setaioli, *Seneca e i Greci*, 171–82, effectively counters Usener’s assumption in *Epicurea*, iv–vii that Seneca knew only a *gnomologion*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ep.* 79.16, 81.11–12, 98.9, 99.25–26. In *Ep.* 81 Seneca does not say that the remarks of Metrodorus he refers to were made in a letter, but it seems likely in view of the other passages. The material in Letters 98 and 99 is likely to be all from the same letter of Metrodorus. For the format of the citation in *Ep.* 99.25, compare the citation of Cicero in 97.3–4, and see, for all these matters, Setaioli, *Seneca e i Greci*, 249–56.

<sup>13</sup> All translations from the *Letters on Ethics* are from Graver and Long, *Seneca: Letters on Ethics*.

<sup>14</sup> *NQ* 6.20.5–7 (the passage is given in Usener, *Epicurea*, as fragment 151). In this context it is worth noting that Seneca in the *Natural Questions* sometimes follows the principle of multiple explanations, which we know as Epicurean; see further Inwood, *Reading Seneca*, 183. I am not convinced, however, that this principle must have been derived solely from Epicurus. The meteorological tradition has its own conventions, and Seneca’s use of it is rather different from what we find in Epicurus; see for instance *NQ* 5.5.1, and see Graver, “Response to Inwood”; Hine, *Lucius Annaeus Seneca: Natural Questions*, 3–7.

<sup>15</sup> Seneca mentions the point a number of times: *Ben.* 4.19.1–2, 7.31.3; *Ep.* 90.35. For Cicero see *De natura deorum* 1.18, but that passage is too oblique to have been Seneca’s source. Concerning Seneca’s sources for *On Benefits* see Griffin, *Seneca on Society*, 15–25, as well as Griffin’s notes on particular passages.

<sup>16</sup> Inwood, *Reading Seneca*, 163–64.

<sup>17</sup> Compare *Lucr. DRN* 1.370–97, but the debate is older than Epicurus; see Plato *Timaeus* 79a–80c.

<sup>18</sup> Also of interest here is the argument of *On Benefits* 4.4, which sets the Epicureans’ denial of divine beneficence against their own argument from the agreement of all peoples (*consensus omnium*). For the role of this argument in Epicurean theology see Obbink, “Atheism of Epicurus,” 190–94; Konstan (2011) 61–69.

<sup>19</sup> *Ben.* 4.19.1–3, reading *extra mundum*; compare 7.31.3, and see the parallels in Usener 1887, 242–43, section 364.

<sup>20</sup> *Vita beata* 12.4, 13.1; and for Epicurus’s personal habits see *Ep.* 18.9 and 33.2.

<sup>21</sup> From what Seneca says in *Ep.* 85.18, it seems that Epicurus (who may use a different criterion for sufficiency: see Inwood, *Seneca*, 229–30) holds that virtue always yields a pleasurable life and yet denies that it is *sufficient* for a pleasurable life. But Seneca himself thinks Epicurus is committed to the sufficiency thesis.

<sup>22</sup> *Vita beata* 9.1–2; compare DL 7.86.

<sup>23</sup> *Vita beata* 10.2. Except in *Ep.* 66.45 (for which see n. 26), Seneca does not seem to recognize the Epicurean distinction emphasized by Cicero in Books 1 and 2 of *De finibus* between pleasures of activity (kinetic or “in movement”) and pleasures of state (katastematic). *Vita beata* 7.4 treats *all* pleasures as kinetic.

<sup>24</sup> Arguments from common conceptions (*communis sensus*) and from the agreement of all (*consensus omnium*) play an important role in Epicurean theology: see Obbink, “The Atheism of Epicurus,” 190–94; Konstan, “Epicurus on the Gods,” 61–69.

<sup>25</sup> *Const. sap.* 16.1; cf. *Ep.* 66.47–48 and 92.25–6.

<sup>26</sup> Seneca’s argument is interesting not only for its opportunism but because it suggests an awareness on Seneca’s part of a difference in structure between kinetic and katastematic pleasure. Epicurus does not maintain the equality of *all* goods; i.e. of all pleasures: kinetic pleasures differ in magnitude. Seneca’s point, however, is that some Epicurean pleasures are defined by privation (*katasterēs*; cf. *Ep.* 87.39), and that privation is a non-scalar property in the same way as consistency is.

<sup>27</sup> *Ben.* 4.13.1; *Ep.* 88.5; *Ep.* 68.10.

<sup>28</sup> *Ep.* 87.19.

<sup>29</sup> Although many of the early letters are only general exhortations to practice philosophy, Letters 8, 9, 23, 24, and 29 all clearly adopt a Stoic perspective.

<sup>30</sup> On occasion Seneca will carry the Epicurean thought in a new direction: *Ep.* 20.10–11, for instance, argues *against* Epicurus’s emphasis on literal poverty. A more puzzling case is 22.13–16, where Schmid, “Eine falsche Epikurdeutung Senecas,” has argued that Seneca deliberately misconstrues SV 60.

<sup>31</sup> This suggestion by Schottländer, “Epikureisches bei Seneca,” 136–37, rightly resisted by Mazzoli, “Le Epistulae Morales,” has been defended by Miriam Griffin, “Seneca’s Pedagogic Strategy,” 91, primarily on the basis of *Epp.* 20.9 and 23.9, but see below. It is not the case that Lucilius “is clearly represented as speaking for Epicurus” in *Ep.* 20.11: the words seem to be addressed to Epicurus himself (although the text is corrupt), but the objection is one that might be voiced by anyone. Griffin notes that since Lucilius appears to be a Stoic in the *Natural Questions* and *De providentia*, the alleged Epicurean Lucilius of the *Epistulae Morales* must be Seneca’s creation. He would then be a surrogate for the popularity of Epicurean views within the wider audience that Seneca expects to reach with the *Letters*. But it would surely be a strange gesture for a Stoic author to publicly assign Epicurean views to a friend who did not actually hold such views.

<sup>32</sup> *Ep.* 12.10 (*peculium*); *Epp.* 10.5 and 16.7 (*munusculum*); *Ep.* 15.9 (*munus Graecum*, accepting Haase’s emendation).

<sup>33</sup> Chrysippus *apud* Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.51 (SVF 3.474), cited by Setaioli, *Seneca e i Greci*, 245 in this connection, does not have any bearing on the question of Lucilius’s philosophical adherence. It does show an openness on the part of Chrysippus to using arguments from a rival philosophical school in a therapeutic context, but only in addressing persons in the immediate grip of strong emotions (see further Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 196–201).

<sup>34</sup> Articles by Inwood, “The Importance of Form in Seneca’s Philosophical Letters,” 141–46 and Wildberger, “The Epicurus Trope,” develop in more detail the suggestions of Lana, “Le ‘Lettere a Lucilio’ nella letteratura epistolare,” 268–74 and Rosati, “Seneca sulla lettera filosofica.”

<sup>35</sup> Inwood, “The Importance of Form in Seneca’s Philosophical Letters,” 143.

<sup>36</sup> Griffin, *Seneca*, 352; see also Schmid, “Eine falsche Epikurdeutung Senecas,” 130. The suggestion is developed at some length in Graver, “Therapeutic Reading and Seneca’s *Moral Epistles*.”

<sup>37</sup> It is worth noting that Philodemus, writing over a century before Seneca, treats the *Key Doctrines* as a work of Epicurus’s own (*De ira* col. 43.20–1).

<sup>38</sup> *Ep.* 97.16. It should perhaps be pointed out that the Latin word *conscientia* refers only to one's awareness of what has been done; it is not equivalent to "moral sense."

<sup>39</sup> Compare the last words of Letter 105, *nocens habuit aliquando latendi fortunam, numquam fiduciam*, with the words quoted from Epicurus in 97.13: *potest nocenti contingere ut lateat, latendi fides non potest*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ep.* 30.5–6, 9–12; cf. *KD* 2; *Ep. Men.* 124–26; *Lucr. DRN* 3.830–42. Compare also the suicide of Diodorus, in *Vita beata* 19.1 "an Epicurean philosopher," who offers a version of the satiety argument, although Seneca notes that there are those who question whether his suicide is consistent with Epicurean doctrine. Of course the questioners are correct: see *Ep. Men.* 126–27 and the fragments quoted by Seneca in *Ep.* 24.22–23, together with Warren, *Facing Death*, 205–12.

<sup>41</sup> *Ep.* 24.18. In some contexts (e.g. at *Ep.* 79.12 and 92.30–34), Seneca takes the Stoic view that the souls of the wise ascend to a dwelling-place in the upper air. But none of us can be certain whether this inspiring prospect is what is in store for *us*. For those who fail to achieve wisdom in life, death means "returning to the universe"; that is, dissolution (*Epp.* 71.16, 76.25).

<sup>42</sup> *Ep.* 36.9; compare *Ep.* 4.3. It is worth pointing out that from an Epicurean perspective, Seneca's uncertainty about postmortem survival removes nearly all force from the argument. *Ep.* 36.9; similarly 4.3.

<sup>43</sup> For the Epicurean material in Cicero, see Tsouna, "Epicurean Therapeutic Strategies," 261; and in more detail, Graver, "Managing Mental Pain."

<sup>44</sup> This is stated in Cicero's account and is also present by implication in the deathbed letter to Idomeneus. The emphasis on pleasures derived from past experience is found also in *Ben.* 3.4.1–2, where Epicurus is named. See also *Ep.* 81.11–12 on the gratitude of the wise in Metrodorus.

<sup>45</sup> *Cic. Tusc.* 3.32.

<sup>46</sup> See *Epp.* 4.10, 16.7–8, 119.5–7, and compare *Ep. Men.* 127–28, *KD* 21. One can hardly suppose with Lana, "Le 'Lettere a Lucilio' nella letteratura epistolare," 285 that Seneca's interest in Epicureanism waned after *Ep.* 92. Clear references in fact continue practically to the end of the extant collection, at 123.10.

<sup>47</sup> The utterance credited to Epicurus in *Epp.* 66.18 and 67.15 is recognizably the same as the one reported a number of times in Cicero, but the wording in Latin is significantly different, as if independently translated from the same Greek source. Usener, *Epicurea*, 338–39, §601, groups the Latin passages together with *DL* 10.118, which however reports a different Epicurean claim, that the wise person is *eudaimōn* while being twisted on the rack but will cry and groan.

<sup>48</sup> I treat the passage in more detail in Graver, "The Emotional Intelligence of Epicureans"; and its context in Graver, "The Weeping Wise."

<sup>49</sup> Pressing the validity of his attribution, Seneca quotes the passage in Greek as well as in his own Latin translation. Clay, *Paradosis and Survival*, 66 connects the pleasure identified by Metrodorus with the "peculiar form of pleasure" (*ἰδιотρόπω ῥήδοντι*) mentioned in *Plut. Non Posse* 16.1097e.

## CHAPTER 20

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# PLUTARCH

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MICHAEL ERLER

## INTRODUCTION

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Thus spoke the Epicurean, Quietus, and before anyone could answer, he left, since we had reached the end of the colonnade.

(*De sera* 548)

PLUTARCH's treatise *De sera numinis vindicta* begins with an exit, either by an Epicurean, or by Epicurus himself.<sup>1</sup> However, the philosophers' theses regarding God and his involvement with human affairs stimulate those present to such an extent that they want to continue the discussion. Plutarch's text covers the ensuing dialogue. On a literary level, this scenario constitutes a reminiscence of the opening of Plato's *Philebus*, which begins with Philebus's exit and goes on to cover the discussions provoked by his thesis that Pleasure constitutes the ultimate Good. On a symbolical level, the beginning of Plutarch's dialogue reflects on the role Epicureanism played in the early Empire. At this point in time, the Epicurean tradition had ceased to develop further, and Hellenistic philosophy as a whole gradually ceded the center stage to Platonism. Nevertheless, Epicurus's precepts



stayed on the contemporaries' minds, were considered provocative, and therefore remained alive in literature and education.<sup>2</sup> Plutarch himself, a priest at Delphi and an enthusiastic adherent of "divine" Plato,<sup>3</sup> found himself diametrically opposed to Epicurus's teachings, yet granted considerable space to discussions of his propositions. In doing so, Plutarch was apparently less concerned with a systematic refutation of Epicurus. Rather, it seems that Plutarch used Epicurus as a welcome foil to highlight his own, Platonist positions and to justify and underline his loyalty to Plato's teachings.

## SOURCES

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Plutarch devoted a considerable number of his writings entirely to discussions of Epicurean doctrines. In these texts, he points out significant discrepancies between the theory and practice of Epicurean teachings (*Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*, Lamprias catalogue nr. 82); discusses Epicurus's deistic theology, e.g. the rejection of providence (*De sera numinis vindicta*, Lamprias catalogue nr. 91); discusses Epicurus's thesis that parents' love for their children is not natural (*De amore prolis*, not in the Lamprias catalogue); criticizes Epicurus's seemingly apolitical stance (*De latenter vivendo*, Lamprias catalogue nr. 178); and in one treatise (*Adversus Colotem*, Lamprias catalogue nr. 81) discusses a work by the Epicurean Colotes, who posited that it is impossible to live according to the precepts of other philosophers (*Περὶ τοῦ ὅτι κατὰ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων φιλοσόφων δόγματα οὐδὲ ζῆν ἔστιν*). Other works that touch on Epicurean subjects, but are known only by title, are listed in the Lamprias catalogue.<sup>4</sup> All of this indicates that Plutarch engaged deeply with the entire breadth of Epicurean doctrine. After all, even those of Plutarch's writings that do not deal directly or exclusively with the subject do frequently bring up Epicurean teachings and, more often than not, refute them.<sup>5</sup> Helmbold and E. N. O'Neil detect more than 270 allusions to and quotations from Epicurus and his students in Plutarch's writings, which moves Epicurus into the quantitative vicinity of writers like Chrysippus (384); it will hardly be surprising that Plato and Aristotle lead the field.<sup>6</sup> Even discussions that do not feature an Epicurean interlocutor at times touch on Epicurus's school or

assume Epicurean teachings in the background.<sup>7</sup> Even the *Lives* show traces of Epicurean subjects, albeit only occasionally, and—significantly—in polemical contexts. For example, the *Comparatio Cimonis et Luculli* reproaches the Roman Lucullus for exchanging a life in politics for a life of pleasure. In the *Vita Pyrrhonis*, Cineas explains Epicurus’s theology, political philosophy, and teachings on pleasure to Fabricius, which makes the latter wish that Pyrrhus would adopt such destructive precepts, at least while they remain enemies.<sup>8</sup> Throughout, Plutarch emerges as well-versed not only in texts by the school’s founder, Epicurus, but also in the writings of such notable Epicurean disciples as Hermarchus, Metrodorus, Colotes, or even Lucretius (see ch. 8). Plutarch’s *Against Colotes* (*Adversus Colotem*) and its sequel, *Non posse*, grant insights into the ways in which Plutarch and his friends engaged with Epicurean matters in a kind of seminar.<sup>9</sup> They read an Epicurean text together, in this case one authored by Epicurus’s student Colotes, critiqued it, and then debated Epicurean theses in further discussions (*Non posse*).

## BACKGROUND

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Plutarch’s remarkable interest in Epicureanism aligns with the doctrine’s persistent importance throughout the first and second centuries CE, even amidst continued hostility and the rise of Platonism.<sup>10</sup> In 176 CE, a chair for Epicureanism was established at Athens. Platonists like Numenius were critical of Epicureanism, but nevertheless perceived it as a formidable foe. Diogenes Laertius’s work on the history of philosophy devoted one full book each to Plato and Epicurus. In Oenoanda, a man called Diogenes dedicated a monumental inscription to Epicurus’s teachings, which was supposed to benefit all.<sup>11</sup> Epicurean teachings are reflected in a variety of contexts, in philosophical discourse as much as in Greek and Roman literature. Most frequently, the perspective is critical, but at times, the verdict is positive (e.g. in Seneca, Lucian, Diogenian, Celsus). Even the Alexandrian Church Fathers engage with Epicurus’s doctrine and include it in their discussion of pagan positions.<sup>12</sup> Epicurus’s oft-praised lifestyle lent authority to his ethics and impressed even critical opponents. Plutarch, for one, even respected Epicurus’s character, his interactions with his friends,

his ability to share everything with them.<sup>13</sup> If nothing else, so Plutarch, he inspired and influenced many (Plut. *De frat. amor* 487d):

For even if they were mistaken in their opinion, yet since they were convinced and constantly declared from their earliest childhood that there was no one wiser than Epicurus, we may well admire both the man who inspired this devotion and also those who felt it.<sup>14</sup>

The Epicurean understanding of philosophy as an improvement of life (*philosophia medicans*) and Epicurus's practical advice on life and learning certainly contributed to this interest. Both of these aspects aligned well with the Romans' practical approach to philosophy and the early Imperial era's tendency to focus on this world rather than on the beyond.<sup>15</sup> The same applies to Plutarch, who understood philosophy primarily as an *ars vitae*<sup>16</sup> and wrote with the express intention of assisting people, helping them get oriented within society, and defining their relationship to God. In spite of all criticisms, his writings at times betray an appreciation for the practical side of Epicurean doctrine, and even methodological similarities.

## PERSONA IN PLUTARCH'S WRITINGS

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It is not solely on the level of content that the contemporary importance of Epicureanism is reflected in Plutarch's œuvre. In dedicating his *Adversus Colotem* to Lucius Herennius Saturninus, proconsul of Achaia in 98/99, Plutarch apparently assumed that the highest circles were interested in engaging with Epicurus's teachings. Furthermore, Plutarch frequently introduces people of high rank and friends from the aristocracy as interlocutors with Epicurean tendencies. In spite of their philosophical position, he treats them kindly and with respect;<sup>17</sup> only rarely does he criticize them aggressively.<sup>18</sup> Among these interlocutors is Boethus, a friend from Plutarch's student days, who—in the *De Pythiae oraculis*—appears as an Epicurean partisan<sup>19</sup> and adduces Epicurus's critique of the oracles; each of Boethus's interventions in the dialogue marks a shift in the conversation's progress. His attitude toward divination corresponds to what other sources lead us to believe about Epicurus's doctrine.<sup>20</sup> In the *Quaestiones convivales* Alexander, a sensible and learned Epicurean,

discusses Pythagorean dietetics (635e–636a); in the same text, the Epicurean Xenocles mocks Plutarch’s brother Lamprias (635a–c), and the physician Zephyrus, who is well acquainted with Epicurus’s *Symposium* (653b), explains, among other things, Epicurus’s thesis that sexual intercourse is detrimental to a person’s health.<sup>21</sup> Plutarch’s writings thus constitute a monument to friendly interactions with Epicureans. However, Plutarch’s writings can, at times, also provide examples of less flexible dealings with Epicurus’s followers.<sup>22</sup> Yet overall, it is clear that Plutarch knew how to distinguish between people and their philosophical positions, and that he cultivated a tolerant mode of interaction that recalls Cicero’s approach to the Epicurean Velleius. This stylistic choice suits both writers’ dialogues, which are set in country *villae* and replace a substantive search for knowledge with conversation and a free exchange of thought.<sup>23</sup>

## CONTINUITY

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It may be safe to say, then, that in Plutarch’s œuvre, Epicureanism constitutes a prominent and consistent point of reference for discussions of philosophical positions.<sup>24</sup> Even though the absence of anti-Epicurean statements in theological writings like *De daimonio Socratis*, *De Iside*, or *De amore* has led some to posit a shift in Plutarch’s intellectual development, these conclusions are problematic.<sup>25</sup> After all, the chronology of Plutarch’s writings is far from well-enough established to provide a reliable foundation for such speculations. Furthermore, writings like Plutarch’s *De amore prolis*, which he likely composed before the *De superstitione*, do criticize Epicurus.<sup>26</sup> Finally, it is unclear if Plutarch’s polemic in the *De superstitione* is targeted at an Epicurean source.<sup>27</sup> The position he here attributes to his opponents—that the gods do not exist—is, after all, not Epicurean. And if Plutarch at times reveals positive estimations of Epicurean doctrine,<sup>28</sup> the context shows that this tactic is meant to demean the position of such opponents as the Stoics.<sup>29</sup>

## PLUTARCH, AN EXPERT ON EPICUREAN DOCTRINE

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Plutarch's writings thus create the impression that their author was excellently acquainted with Epicurus's teachings and the Epicurean tradition. We learn that he owned a library (albeit a small one)<sup>30</sup> and that he had access to books in Athens (*De E* 384e). There is much to suggest, then, that he had direct access to the works of Epicurus and his students, such as Metrodorus and especially Colotes.<sup>31</sup> At the very least, he has such characters of his dialogues as Aristodemus claim that they read Epicurus's letters.<sup>32</sup> Plutarch offers up literal quotations from Epicurus and his disciples,<sup>33</sup> as well as Epicurus's technical terminology and paraphrases that may at times be vague, but are often quite close to the original (at least as far as we can tell).<sup>34</sup> Occasionally, a text by Epicurus (e.g. a letter) is adduced simply to discuss Epicurus's language.<sup>35</sup> The treatise *Adversus Colotem* has us witness a group's joint reading of one of Colotes's works. We may also assume that Plutarch had additional second-hand knowledge, especially since in his time Epicurus's doctrine was part of the Koine.<sup>36</sup> Plutarch was likely also familiar with other authors' critiques of Epicurus, be they of Sceptical/Academic or Stoic provenance.<sup>37</sup> It is particularly remarkable that Plutarch apparently was familiar with more than just the Greek sources of Epicurean teachings. Although the author admits to difficulties in mastering Latin, some passages in Plutarch's œuvre create the impression that he may have used Lucretius's *De rerum natura* as a source.<sup>38</sup> His explanation of magnetism<sup>39</sup> suggests this as much as a passage in *De amore prolis* (493–4) on sexual attraction among animals in the spring, which recalls the Hymn to Venus.<sup>40</sup> There can therefore be no doubt that Plutarch's writings constitute an important step in the reception of Epicureanism and a rich source for those attempting to restore Epicurean writings and doctrines.

## PLUTARCH AS SOURCE AND AUTHOR

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It is no coincidence, then, that Plutarch's œuvre serves as a rich mine in any endeavor to reconstruct Epicurean doctrine and texts. But of course, there is reason for caution. After all, we have to account for the fact that Plutarch was not interested in providing a systematic presentation of Epicurean dogma or statements, even where he did engage directly with Epicurean thought. Nor are his polemics primarily interested in refuting Epicurus. Rather, recent research has made it increasingly clear that Plutarch is much more interested in a defense or legitimization of his own positions than in disproving Epicurus's. More than anything, he wants to cast his own convictions in a positive light; in this context, Epicurus appears as a necessary and appropriate foil that helps Plutarch build consensus. The strategic quality of his presentation is particularly apparent on those rare occasions when Plutarch brings himself to pass positive judgment.<sup>41</sup> A careful analysis reveals that his positive verdict serves solely to undermine competing positions, such as those held by the Stoa, and to lend support to his own teachings (*De aud. poet.* 37a). These biases require those attempting to learn about Epicurus from Plutarch to tread carefully and to account for each passage's immediate contexts, the text's literary genre, and Plutarch's immediate motivation.<sup>42</sup> Even where he cites Epicurean texts verbatim or provides paraphrases that stick closely to the original, he is guided by his own objectives, not by a wish to do justice to his sources. It is true, of course, that Plutarch does reflect on the correct use of quotations, wherein he differs from Colotes, for example. He claims that he is precise and that, unlike Colotes, he does not cite material out of context (*Non posse* 1086c). Nevertheless, the fact that Plutarch feels justified in following the ancient practice of adjusting quotations to new contexts "for clarity's sake," and even of introducing straightforward changes, should sound a note to caution. Even though he does at times reproduce *Epicurea* correctly,<sup>43</sup> he frequently cites Epicurean statements without providing their context—a practice that he in fact holds against Colotes (*Adv. Col.* 1108d)—and exaggerates their content in a manner that skews their original intention but aids his own polemic argument. For example, he provides a radical reading of Epicurus's famous maxim "live in obscurity" that is as self-serving as his treatment of the thesis, allegedly refuted by Epicurus, that parents' concern for their children is a natural drive. In the process, he sacrifices a more sophisticated understanding of these postulates, which is in fact attested in the Epicureans, to the requirements of the case he is currently making.



Plutarch thus emerges as using quotations to refute and expose as untenable positions that he attributes to the Epicureans, but that he has exaggerated or misrepresented. He frequently singles out terms for criticism that would cause no offense in their original context, such as when he claims that calling a gift “divine” contradicts Epicurus’s deistic theology (*Non posse* 1097c–d = Usener 183). Nor are such strategic considerations limited to places where Plutarch explicitly adduces Epicurean thought. It is similarly interesting to note where Plutarch does not mention Epicurean theses:<sup>44</sup> for example, he does not grant space to Epicurus’s critique of thirst for glory (*δοξοκοπία*), even where it would have supported his argument (*Non posse* 1101b); nor does he mention Epicurus’s praise of friendship,<sup>45</sup> or his praise of security as a precondition for *ataraxia*. This illustrates once again that Plutarch seems not to have been particularly interested in a nuanced appraisal of Epicurus. Accordingly, modern scholarship has gained much from focusing on a Plutarchean text’s literary genre (such as the dialogue form), the author’s intention, as well as his rhetorical strategies and the resultant distortions.<sup>46</sup> It is no longer Plutarch as a source for Epicureanism, but increasingly Plutarch’s role in the school’s reception that has moved to the foreground. Of course, the mere fact that Plutarch’s own aims have shaped his critiques of Epicureanism does not mean that they are necessarily and fundamentally flawed. Still, we are within our rights to inquire to what extent context and generic rules have impacted the presentation. This focus on the contexts of Plutarch’s Epicurean material can also help us appreciate how he handled his sources, both in general and relating to other schools. What is more, this kind of methodology can not only shed light on Plutarch’s engagement with the Epicurean tradition and the early Imperial reception of Epicurean thought, but it can also suggest comparisons to the practices of pagan and Christian authors in the later Empire. There is rich potential here for further research into the instrumentalization of Epicurean thought at different historical moments that would focus, as in Plutarch’s case, less on gaining insights into Epicurus himself. Instead, it would yield insights into the ways in which he was treated by later generations. If Plutarch relies on traditional Epicurean thought in a manner that does not teach us much about this doctrine, but that serves his polemical purposes, then this observation contributes to our understanding both of Plutarch and of the role that Epicureanism played in the author’s writings and in his day.



## PLUTARCH THE ANTI-EPICUREAN: DIFFERENCES OF PRINCIPLE

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Plutarch's philosophical views are diametrically opposed to almost any aspect of Epicurean doctrine. He considers Epicurus's teachings a "confusion of self-contradictions" (*Adv. Col.* 1121e). As a Platonist, Plutarch decisively rejects Epicurus's atomism,<sup>47</sup> both with respect to the number of atoms being infinite and their moving the way he posits. For Plutarch, atom and void are not the first principles, but God and the element that brings about disorder (unlimited dualism).<sup>48</sup> Most importantly, he critically engages with the question of the origins of the qualities. Unlike Epicurus, Plutarch as a Platonist believes in an eternal God as a driving, immaterial source and assumes a teleological perspective. He refutes that moving atoms can form a stable, unchanging object,<sup>49</sup> and asks how it is possible that atoms devoid of qualities can create qualities. This latter question Plutarch answers from a Platonist-Aristotelian position, according to which qualities are already observable in the atoms themselves. Of course, this Plutarchean critique and its not inherently implausible alternative claim that atoms either already have qualities to begin with, or receive them when they connect, is a direct contradiction of Epicurean claims. After all, the Epicureans, as Plutarch was well aware, thought that aggregates of quality-free atoms constituted more than the sum of their parts (*περιπλοκή*). Even in matters of psychology Plutarch and Epicurus are worlds apart.<sup>50</sup> Plutarch assumes the existence of an immaterial, immortal, rational soul, while Epicurus considers the soul a material conglomerate of atoms that dissolves in death. Plutarch contrasts Epicurus's claim that the soul is mortal<sup>51</sup> with Plato's doctrine of the immortality of the soul, a soul that is expected to undergo metempsychosis and whose existence in the beyond,<sup>52</sup> just as in Plato's myths, involves a threat of punishment. At the same time, we should note that Plutarch, not unlike Epicurus, apparently does not consider these images of the beyond very realistic.<sup>53</sup> An additional deficit in Epicurean psychology as analyzed by Plutarch consists in the claim that the rational soul is considered nameless.<sup>54</sup> Plutarch considers this an admission of ignorance. In the field of epistemology, Plutarch does not

share Epicurus's optimism that the senses provide unmediated and unobstructed access to reality. Rather, he sides with the Sceptics of the Academy.<sup>55</sup> While he does not demand abstention from all judgment, he doubts that secure understanding can ever be obtained and grants only God the capacity for reliable knowledge. In ethics, finally, Plutarch agitates against hedonism: Epicurus's thesis that pleasure is the natural aim of all human activity contradicts Plutarch's own conviction that virtue (*τὸ καλόν*) is to be pursued (*De lat. viv.* 1129b). Rather than pursue pleasure, the ultimate goal for him is to grow more similar to God by focusing on one's immaterial soul and rationality (*De sera vind.* 550d–e). In this polemic, Plutarch of course follows the traditional line of reducing the Epicurean idea of pleasure to a “pleasure of the belly” (*Adv. Col.* 1108c; *Non posse* 1087d). He does, however, agree with Epicurus that people are capable of moral improvement.<sup>56</sup> It is for this reason that Plutarch hopes to contribute to humanity's ethical progress through his *Moralia* and the *Lives*.<sup>57</sup> If Plutarch, in contemplating nature, praises God, justice, and providence (*De lat. viv.* 1129b), then there are parallels to, but also fundamental discrepancies from, Epicurean theology. For Epicurus too, the contemplation of nature is a necessary condition for philosophical and theological insight,<sup>58</sup> and in spite of all accusations to the contrary—Plutarch speaks of his atheism (*Adv. Col.* 1119e)—neither does Epicurus ever question the existence of the gods.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, Plutarch's theology differs fundamentally from Epicurus's, whose deistic views do not allow for the kind of divine providence that the Platonist propagates as the basis for human happiness. According to Epicurus, providence would not befit the existence of the gods in the intermundia, which precludes all divine intervention (*RS* 1). For Plutarch, by contrast, it is precisely providence that defines the eternal and unchangeable God, who creates, steers, and directs everything (*Non posse* 1092b). Furthermore, providence is helpful in that, according to Plutarch, a negative force works against God, which he has to tame.<sup>60</sup> Plutarch agrees with Epicurus that superstition constitutes a main reason for low quality of life and needs to be eliminated. At the same time, Epicurus considers it essential to the liberation from superstition that one recognize that the gods are inactive and do not care for human beings. For Plutarch, on the other hand, providence makes a qualitative contribution to human life. It is for this reason that he accuses the Epicureans of depriving

themselves of one of the main sources of human happiness—i.e., the awareness of divine care—by means of their deistic beliefs (*Non posse* 1107b). After all, if cult and prayer are, according to Plutarch’s understanding, meaningless to the Epicureans, or even constitute hypocrisy, then people find themselves robbed of important mental pleasures, most notably the feeling of God’s presence and mercy (*Non posse* 1102a–b). Plutarch is of the opinion that it is only the belief in divine involvement in human affairs that can prevent evil (*Non posse* 1101d). Remove providence from the equation and you lose this leverage.

## METHOD

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Plutarch, then, is not interested in a systematic discussion and refutation of Epicurus’s doctrine. There is no treatise in which he presents Epicurus’s arguments in a complete and appropriate fashion and then refutes them by strictly outlining the untenability of their content. Rather, his approach is selective.<sup>61</sup> In the process, Plutarch is often guided by the rules of rhetoric and comments on different themes in different treatises as is dictated by the varying theses at hand. Here, different contexts and modes of presentation—be it dialogue form, be it *declamatio*—factor into any evaluation of his anti-Epicurean arguments.<sup>62</sup> Plutarch has a preferred, rather traditional “toolkit” that he employs consistently. His technique of refuting the opinions of one school (e.g. Epicurus’s) by presenting those of another (e.g. the Stoa’s) as relatively preferable arguably recalls Carneades (cf. Cic. *ND* 1.121).<sup>63</sup> Plutarch employs argumentative strategies that, at times, correspond to those of the Epicureans.<sup>64</sup> He shares not only Epicurus’s belief in philosophy’s therapeutic character.<sup>65</sup> Plutarch also agrees with Epicurus—and, significantly, Socrates—that philosophical convictions need to have consequences for one’s life. Furthermore, he is convinced that such convictions in fact only develop in action (*De prof. virt.* 79d–80a). The question of a possible discrepancy between theory and the relevant life-practice is one of Plutarch’s main criteria in assessing philosophical schools (Plut. *De stoic. rep.* 1033a–b):

In the first place I require that the consistency of men's doctrines be observed in their way of living, for it is even more necessary that the philosopher's life be in accord with his theory than that the orator's language, as Aeschines says, be identical with that of the law. The reason is that the philosopher's theory is a law freely chosen for his own—at least it is if they believe philosophy to be not a game of verbal ingenuity played for the sake of glory but, as it really is, an activity worthy of the utmost earnestness.<sup>66</sup>

Accordingly, hints at inconsistencies between theory and practice serve as Plutarch's main argument in his confrontations with other schools, especially with Epicureanism, but also with the Stoa.<sup>67</sup> Possible contradictions, then, in argument and presentation allow for conclusions concerning a theory's worth. The close connection between life and theory produces such methods as elenchus (ἐλέγχος), correction (ἐπανόρθωσις), and challenge (νουθέτησις), which recall both Socratic and Epicurean testing techniques. They are meant to promote correct insights and liberate from false assumptions. Plutarch also employs a method called *epilogismos* in his analysis of the affects, by which term he signifies the correct evaluation and assessment (*krisis*) of an affect with recourse to empirical facts;<sup>68</sup> this definition recalls a technique that the Epicureans also called *epilogismos*.<sup>69</sup> Its concern is to examine empirically observable behaviors in order to evaluate the decision that led to said behaviors. Plutarch employs *epilogismos* in a manner that Epicurus in the *De natura* recommends for the evaluation of pragmatic virtue and that Philodemus uses in *De ira*. Plutarch is generally concerned with analyzing disadvantages and damages, and a standardized *epilogismos* is part of these inquiries. For this, too, we find examples in Philodemus. Plutarch considers the *epilogismos* an important part of *krisis*, just as Philodemus does in *De ira* (col. VII Indelli). Philodemus agrees that it is only once the nature of the affect has been recognized, its consequences have been understood, and the affect has been evaluated based on these consequences, that actual treatment can proceed; hence the common demand to visualize certain phenomena in order to reliably gauge opinions and feelings.<sup>70</sup> The parallelism between this method and Epicurus's *epilogismoi* is most apparent in Plutarch's *De cohibenda ira*. There, Fundanus reports on damages resulting from the affect Anger and calls such hints at empirical data *epilogismos* (456e). Like the Epicureans, Plutarch sees the benefits of such *epilogismoi* in their ability to trigger reluctance and fear by pointing to empirically demonstrable consequences (455e–f). It has been suggested that this attitude harks back to Plato (cf.

Plat. *Rep.* 455e, 456b) and some have pointed to Plato's discussion of the cathartic effect of reluctance and fear in the *Laws* (cf., e.g., *Lg.* 646e–647a).<sup>71</sup> These are important points of reference, which can legitimize the method as Platonic. However, one should also factor in the Epicurean method. An additional mode of argumentation that Plutarch favored in confrontations with the Epicureans consists in taking an opposing position, i.e. Epicurus's, as a starting point and in demonstrating that it does not in fact lead to the posited conclusions.<sup>72</sup> This method is common in Epicurean contexts and forms the basis for the refutation strategy that Colotes employs in the treatise that Plutarch's interlocutors discuss in his seminar.<sup>73</sup> Not only does he demonstrate that this strategy does not provide the desired results in the philosophers whom Colotes attacks, but he also shows in his own writings (*Non posse*) that the method *does* work with Epicurus. The two treatises (see below), then, reflect not only a competition of content, but also one of methodology, between Plutarch and the Epicureans. That works like *Non posse* can and should help in the teaching of methods as well, Plutarch highlights himself (1086d):

If for no other reason, at least to show persons who undertake to set others right that they must each study with care the arguments and books of the men they impugn, and must not mislead the inexperienced by detaching expressions from different contexts ...<sup>74</sup>

An additional feature of Plutarch's polemic against Epicurus is his handling of quotations from, and learned allusions to, non-philosophical literature and terminology. His evident skill in employing poetry in his refutations of Epicurus may in fact be meant as an indirect polemic against Epicurus's alleged lack of *Paideia* (1092e–1096e). Of course, a glance at Philodemus's writings and comments on the use of *paideia* in propagating Epicurean doctrine<sup>75</sup> could teach us that Plutarch, like Cicero before him, was playing up stereotypes. After all, Plutarch's argumentative strategy lays claim to the prerogative of changing quotations from Epicurus and the Epicureans with respect to their word order, to replace words with synonyms, and to leave out or add words in order to clarify the relevant passage's meaning.

## CASE STUDIES

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## *Adversus Colotem*

One of Plutarch's central concerns in his discussions of other philosophical positions is to examine whether theory corresponds to practice. The treatise *Against Colotes*<sup>76</sup> provides an opportunity to study how Plutarch engages with his adversary, the Epicurean Colotes, whose own attacks on numerous other schools employed quite similar strategies. Both the work's content, then, and its methodology are of great interest. Colotes, whom Diogenes Laertius numbers among Epicurus's "esteemed" students,<sup>77</sup> emerges as an author prone to polemics, predominantly against Scepticism and especially the sceptical Academy and its head, Arcesilaus (Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1120c). His attacks also targeted Democritus as the school's intellectual father. Remains of Colotes's writings on Platonic dialogues have been found on papyri in Herculaneum.<sup>78</sup> Cicero and later Macrobius and Proclus reacted directly or indirectly to his criticism of the Myth of Er in Plato's *Republic*.<sup>79</sup> Plato appears to be a main target of his attacks. Furthermore, the monumental inscription of Diogenes at Oenoanda demonstrates that Colotes remained influential.<sup>80</sup> His book seems still to have circulated in Plutarch's day. It is, therefore, far from surprising that the Platonist Plutarch wrote a counter offensive against Colotes and especially against the summary attacks he advanced in a treatise<sup>81</sup> he seems to have dedicated to Ptolemy Philadelphos (282–246 BCE) and that bore the title "That It Is Not Even Possible to Live According to the Doctrines of the Other Philosophers" (*Ne vivi quidem posse secundum aliorum philosophorum decreta*, Περὶ τοῦ ὅτι κατὰ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων φιλοσόφων δόγματα οὐδὲ ζῆν ἔστιν). In this work, the Epicurean engaged with numerous philosophical predecessors and intended to show that their theories make it impossible to live a philosophical life in accordance with their postulates.

In his treatise *Against Colotes*, dedicated to Saturninus (proconsul in Achaia 98–99 CE), Plutarch turns the methodological tables on the Epicurean and advances the thesis that it is impossible to live happily in accordance with *Epicurus's* doctrine. He considers the work a sign of vulgarity, pomposity, and arrogance—an accusation commonly leveled against Epicureans.<sup>82</sup> It is doubtful why Plutarch chose an older Epicurean text as his target, but not Epicurus himself.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps the work's



doxographical character aroused his interest, or perhaps it was the opportunity to distinguish himself in a methodological confrontation with an Epicurean whose text was still in circulation.

In the *Adversus Colotem*, Plutarch provides insights into one of his academy's seminar meetings. We learn that Colotes's work has been read to Plutarch's circle of friends and triggered some protest (1107e–1108b). Plutarch attempts to show that it is impossible to live in accordance with Epicurus' doctrine by discussing—and refuting—what Colotes adduced against specific philosophers. In the process, Plutarch discusses different philosophers in order—Democritus, Parmenides, Empedocles, Socrates, (Melissos), Plato, Stilpon, the Cyrenaics, and Arcesilaus—although he does make slight adjustments to Colotes's original arrangement (1113e, 1116e). As a result, it is possible to use this refutation not only to get an idea of Colotes's treatise,<sup>84</sup> but also to become familiar with Plutarch's method. After all, the discussion—and defense—of the individual positions that Colotes attacks is the sole purpose of the work. It seems to be concerned with a general reckoning of Epicureanism, which Plutarch wants to expose as inherently self-contradictory. In this context, it is remarkable that Plutarch's method occasionally corresponds to his predecessor's. On a content level, his accusations against Colotes and the Epicureans are conventional: the Epicureans supposedly lead a rather ignoble life bound to their lower drives (chh. 1, 2; 1107e–1108d); in addition, Colotes's discussions are said to take opposing positions out of context, to create contradictions with Epicurus's positions in the process, and to attack philosophers like Democritus, whom Epicurus himself admired (ch. 3, 1108d–f). For example, when Colotes accuses Democritus of a relativism reminiscent of Protagoras, he supposedly profoundly misunderstood him (chh. 4–7, 1108f–1110e). Plutarch rejects Colotes's charge against Democritus that qualities are mere conventions and that only atoms and void truly exist as contradicting sense perception and as generally inappropriate. After all, Democritus's conclusion is consistent, while Epicurus avoided it only through inconsistent arguments (ch. 8, 1110e–1111d). According to Plutarch, the thesis advanced by Plato, Aristotle, and Xenocrates, according to which the elements are endowed with qualities, is more plausible (ch. 9, 1111d–e). In response to what he calls a Colotean misinterpretation of some verses of Empedocles, Plutarch demonstrates that soul and life cannot be derived from atoms (chh. 10–12, 1111f–1113e). An



analysis of Parmenides's philosophy is meant to deflect Colotes's reproach that Parmenides's tenet of the One negates the existence of the perceptible world (ch. 13, 1113e–1114f). He adduces Colotes's claim that Plato's ontology was derived from Aristotle, Theophrastus, and the Peripatetics as proof of his lack of philosophical literacy (ch. 14, 1114f–1115c). In turn, Colotes's polemic against Plato's ontology serves as evidence for his inability to understand Plato (ch. 15, 1115c–1116c). Finally, Epicurus's own concept of existence is portrayed as insufficient (ch. 16, 1116c–e). Plutarch counters Colotes's attacks on Socrates (ch. 17, 1116e–1117c) regarding the Delphic Oracle and his actual lifestyle's deviations from his teachings with similar accusations against Epicurus (chh. 18–19, 1117c–1118b). It is, according to Plutarch, not Socrates's inquiry into the essence of man, but Epicurus's prejudices and conceits that destroy the Good Life (chh. 20–21, 1118b–1119c). Following Plutarch's reading, Colotes's attacks against Stilpon and the Cyrenaics do not in fact apply to their teachings or personality, but merely reveal further misunderstandings on Colotes's part (chh. 22–23, 1119c–1120b). The same applies to his critique of the Cyrenaics (24–25, 1120b–1121e) and of Arcesilaus's reticence in matters of knowledge (chh. 26–29, 1121e–1124c). Then, the insight that human activity requires control is up for debate (ch. 30, 1124d–1125c). Finally, Colotes's praise for social institutions is said to overlook that only godliness can guarantee the social order, while the Epicurean position reduces men to animals. What is more, the Epicurean turn away from politics undermines the order of the state, which is founded on religion (ch. 31, 1125c–f) and was promoted precisely by the philosophers Colotes attacks (ch. 32, 1126a–e). The Epicureans, by contrast, are said not to have advanced human community, to have attacked humanity's benefactors, and to accept the laws only from fear of punishment (chh. 33–34, 1126e–1127e).

All of these refutations, then, reverse Colotes's critique of the other schools: not they, but Epicurus's teachings, stand in the way of a happy life and are inherently contradictory. Apparently, Colotes's text, in spite of all polemics, had a protreptic intention. The basis of Colotes's attacks, just as of Plutarch's defense, is the suspicion of a discrepancy between theoretical claims and the practice of everyday life. Especially for the Epicureans, it was important to bring theory and practice into alignment.<sup>85</sup> Colotes's argument that it is impossible to live in accordance with the other philosophers, Plutarch counters in various manners: by showing that the

relevant philosopher does hold the alleged view, but that it does not stand in the way of a happy life; by showing that Colotes misinterpreted the author in question;<sup>86</sup> or by showing that the maligned philosopher never advanced the questionable thesis in the first place. Plutarch thus shows Colotes's attacks to attest mainly to their author's ignorance in philosophical matters or lack of philosophical talent (1108d, 1109a, 1114f–1115a). It is, of course, not always certain that Plutarch is correct. The general claim that Colotes's attacks contradict some of Epicurus's own teachings is central to Plutarch's strategy.<sup>87</sup> It is only Colotes's refutation of Democritus's claim that the qualities are merely conventional that Plutarch seems to agree with (1110f), although there may be rhetorical reasons for this stance. The discussion of the Cyrenaics he does not contradict either (1120c–e).

Whether or not Plutarch is right to allege that Colotes undermines his own philosophical system has to remain an open question. Either way, the claim is programmatic for the rest of his endeavor and relies on the well-established argumentative strategy of the self-defeating argument.<sup>88</sup> Occasionally, Plutarch points out that Colotes's own thesis resembles the one he attacks, which is why his argumentation backfires. At the same time, Plutarch accuses Colotes of methodological shortcomings (1108d), for example because he quotes passages out of context, isolates them, and then criticizes them. Plutarch counters with his own quotations (1108d), although of course his own methods are not above reproach either.

To sum up, Plutarch's *Against Colotes* engages with a protreptic, Epicurean text, appropriates its method, and turns it against the Epicureans. In doing so, Plutarch focuses not only on each individual criticism, but targets the entirety of Epicurean theory. The result is a protreptic text of Plutarch's own that is designed to pull readers over to his own, Platonist position by demonstrating his superior command over method and philosophical content.

## **Refutation of Epicurean Teachings on Pleasure** **(*Non posse*)**

The treatise “That It Is Impossible to Live Pleasantly in Accordance with Epicurus” (*Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*) is a dihegemetic dialogue;<sup>89</sup> Plutarch himself is the narrator. The dialogue presents itself as the continuation of the meeting on which Plutarch reported in the *Against Colotes* and of its discussion of Colotes’s “That It Is Impossible to Live According to the Doctrines of the Other Philosophers” (1086d). There (apparently in Chaironeia) the interlocutors go for a walk after they conclude their seminar on Colotes’s “That It Is Impossible to Live According to the Doctrines of the Other Philosophers.” Plutarch had defended the philosophers against Colotes’s attacks in a lecture. Still, the group is so vexed by the discussion that Theon suggests they prove that it is impossible to live a pleasurable life in accordance with Epicurus’s doctrine (1087a–b). In the treatise *Non posse*, Plutarch commits to writing what additional arguments they produced against Epicurus. As his motivation, he mentions that it is necessary to carefully examine the arguments he wants to refute (1186d), and that one should not be deceived by those who take statements out of context, whereby he establishes a connection to a related accusation against Colotes (*Adv. Col.* 1108d). Apparently, Plutarch wants to offer his treatise as a model of unpolemical and correct engagement with opposing opinions, which he sees as an alternative to Colotes’s approach. Of course, he does not completely live up to this challenge, as his treatment of Epicurean quotations repeatedly demonstrates (cf. *Non posse* 1088d). On a content level, he makes the argument, then, targeted specifically at Epicurus, that it is impossible to live a pleasurable life in accordance with this philosopher’s doctrine (1087a–b). As in the *Against Colotes*, his use of traditional philosophical arguments is determined by the polemical context. After all, Plutarch relies methodologically on Colotes’s attacks against the other philosophers as well as on his own against Colotes, according to which the opponent’s positions are to be turned against himself (περιτρέπων λόγος). In this respect, Plutarch employs the Epicurean Colotes’s strategy against Epicurus. Whoever follows Epicurus’s doctrine does not acquire what it promises. Therefore, Plutarch time and again begins his reflections by referring back to Epicurean positions.<sup>90</sup> He thereby engages in a methodological competition with Colotes as well. Furthermore, he radicalizes the critique by trying to show in direct engagement with Epicurus’s teachings that it is not only impossible to *live pleasantly* but even to *live* in accordance with them, as the otherwise

identical titles of the two treatises already demonstrate. The thesis that a discrepancy exists between Epicurus's philosophical theory and the practice of life forms the basis for this polemic. In order to highlight this discrepancy further, Plutarch relies on other philosophers as well, especially in the beginning, who apparently leveled similar accusations against Epicurus (1086e–f). In doing so, Plutarch's demonstration that the accusations apply particularly well to Epicurus himself gains traction. The treatise, just as the *Against Colotes*, evinces numerous rhetorical elements,<sup>91</sup> such as *praeteritio*, arguments *a fortiori*, and rhetorical questions. It is presented as dialogue and thereby documents Plutarch's literary training. It is possible that this serves as an indirect polemic against Epicurus's alleged aversion to *paideia* (1092e–1096e). What is more, seventy-five literal quotations from Epicurus and other Epicureans suggest that Plutarch was familiar with their works, although one has to factor in the relevant citations' contexts.

The treatise is structured by means of interjections.<sup>92</sup> After an introduction (chh. 2, 3, 1086d–88d) two larger sections are discernible.<sup>93</sup> Plutarch begins by refuting Epicurus's teachings on pleasure (chh. 3–20, 1087c–1101c). The discussion consists of three subsections, marked by citations, that correspond to the parts of Plato's tripartite soul and Aristotle's three kinds of life:<sup>94</sup> first, he suggests that Epicurean pleasure is connected to corporeal lust (chh. 3–8, 1087c–1092d), then he points to the pleasure of the contemplative life, e.g. science, music (chh. 9–14, 1092d–1096e) and the pleasure of the active life, as well as the resultant valuations (chh. 15–19, 1096f–1100d), which the Epicureans do not consider, but which Epicurus held in high esteem. The second segment, which is marked by an intervening separate discussion (1110e) and contains an appreciation of the Epicurean fight against superstition (1100f), addresses religious and theological questions. Two sub-sections—the first speaker is Aristodemus, the second Theon—highlight that Epicurus's stance toward the gods (chh. 20–23, 1100e–1103e) and a life in accordance with his doctrine in fact diminish pleasure; e.g., Platonic and Stoic views provide greater pleasure. After all, the expectation of divine care, which the Epicureans deny, provides gratification, as does the happy anticipation of a paradisiac state, which outweighs the fear of punishment in normal people (chh. 25–30, 1104a–1107a). As a result, Plutarch sees the Epicureans as depriving

themselves of significant sources of pleasure by limiting themselves to the corporeal realm, which excludes, e.g., the immortality of the soul, divine care, love of learning, and honor (ch. 31, 1107b–c). The arguments that Plutarch employs are largely conventional and inappropriate in reducing the Epicureans to pursuing corporeal pleasures. But at the same time, they are determined by the polemical context and fulfill their intended function. In applying the same polemical line of argument, Plutarch proves a match for his opponent.

## Epicurus's Anti-politics (*De latenter*)

Plutarch's philosophy is defined by a strong political component.<sup>95</sup> This may be due to his personal dedication as a politician, but also, and primarily, to his Platonism. Philosophically, Plutarch defends Plato's call for philosopher kings and supports the philosopher's role as advisor to the mighty (*Max. cum princ.*).<sup>96</sup> Here, too, he finds himself diametrically opposed to Epicurus. According to Plutarch, man is political by nature and generally strives toward action (*Non posse* 1107c). He bases this assumption on the myth of autochthony in Plato's *Republic*.<sup>97</sup> Epicurus's political convictions he regards from different angles.<sup>98</sup> His critique of Epicurean politics also plays a role in the *Lives*: Plutarch scolds Lucullus,<sup>99</sup> because he gave up a political career for a life of pleasure, which runs counter to Platonist and Roman views. Plutarch's *De latenter vivendo* is particularly indicative of his attitude toward Epicurean conceptions of politics.<sup>100</sup> Here, we can see especially well how Plutarch polemicizes against Epicurean thought.

The main witness for Plutarch's anti-Epicurean polemic regarding the question of political dedication is the treatise *Live in Obscurity* (1128a–1130e). Here, Plutarch argues in seven chapters that Epicurus's saying, *lathe biosas*, is useless as a basis for a philosophical life. The treatise is obviously governed by rhetorical considerations. Plutarch hopes to show that the philosopher should engage with politics. According to him, man tends naturally toward politics, as well as generally toward action.<sup>101</sup> In this context, Plutarch rejects the so-called *apragmosynē* argument, according to

which political activity is considered *polypragmosynē* and hence detrimental to ataraxia of the soul.<sup>102</sup> As in *De latenter*, he begins with a literal interpretation of a quote by Epicurus<sup>103</sup> and uses Epicurus's opinion for a polemic against Democritus. Supposedly, Epicurus, who was considered a follower of Democritus, granted those men who naturally strove for glory permission to give in to this natural desire.<sup>104</sup>

Some admonitions as to how politicians are to reach their goals in the *polis* may be based on Plutarch's own experience as a politician. As in his other writings, he does not undertake the attack on Epicurus's position for its own sake, but to buttress the Platonist position. Rhetoric, more than philosophy, determines this text's line of argument. Furthermore, Plutarch relies on a long-standing ancient hermeneutical method that decontextualizes statements, then takes them literally, and proceeds to interpret and criticize.<sup>105</sup> Another basis for Plutarch's line of argument is provided by the proof that there is a contradiction between Epicurus's theory and the practice of life. Finally, Plutarch reveals his adversaries to be involved in self-contradictions (*περιτρέπων λόγος*).<sup>106</sup> In this text, Plutarch's approach does not correspond to the demand he makes elsewhere that an opponent's quotations not be decontextualized. Plutarch is able to disprove his adversary by taking the saying literally. His attack on the quote is based on an interpretation that may not correspond to Epicurus's original intention. In several of his writings, Plutarch intends to show that Epicurus himself did not follow his own maxims.

In the *De latenter*, then, Plutarch decontextualizes an Epicurean saying and interprets it. The similarly famous demand to "abstain from politics" survives in Diogenes Laertius's quotation from Epicurus's important, though sadly lost, ethical work *De vitis* 10, 119 = Usener 8.<sup>107</sup> There, however, it does not refer to a disappointed reaction to a specific event, but a way of life, comparable to Philodemus's demand that man should live his life aware of death and his life's vanity.<sup>108</sup> This is not a call for suicide, but an incentive to live life while considering death unimportant. Furthermore, Plutarch seems to know that Epicurus's views are more complex and emphasizes, for example, that those who are naturally inclined toward activity are allowed, according to Epicurus, to engage in politics.<sup>109</sup> This befits Plutarch's polemical strategy, according to which undifferentiated positions are easier to dismantle. What is more, careful differentiations do



not meet the treatise's rhetorical demands. In *De latenter vivendo*, Plutarch argues against the radical reading.<sup>110</sup> The saying "Live in Obscurity" is already a provocation, as is the mere publication of the work, which demonstrates that Epicurus sought precisely the kind of publicity he advised avoiding (1128a–c; 1128f–1129a). What is more, life is nothing shameful and does not need to be hidden (1128c); nor is a life in obscurity especially conducive either to the Good or the Bad of human life (1128d–e). After all, personal seclusion will keep bad people from improving and good people from accomplishing great things. A quick look at history demonstrates that public life provides capable people with a place to realize their potential (1129b–d); it is precisely to activity and, therefore, also to the public that man is inclined in accordance with God's will. Only those who obtain glory in this fashion receive a reward in the afterlife; all others are condemned to darkness (1130c–e).

This treatise's arguments, often described as *declamatio* or *destructio*,<sup>111</sup> are well arranged and recall the rhetorical strategies of diatribe. Plutarch is primarily concerned with demonstrating the inherent contradiction between Epicurus's theories and the practice of life. In the process, he avails himself of a well-established method of ancient polemics, namely to take an opponent's statements—such as "live in obscurity"—out of context, interpret them literally, and then criticize them without accounting for the context, which could have revealed greater nuance on Epicurus's part. In other words, Plutarch's critique of the "live in obscurity" formula is based on an interpretation that need not at all have been Epicurus's own. Indeed, as with all pithy sayings, it makes sense to tread carefully: Epicurus's call for political abstinence in no way precludes an interest in, and active engagement with, the community.<sup>112</sup> In fact, Epicurus calls for restraint only when it comes to direct interactions with political institutions.<sup>113</sup> The reason for this attitude is everybody's shared desire to be safe from other people,<sup>114</sup> as Epicurus clearly expresses at *KD* 6. To rule or to be king, then, can be a natural good for an Epicurean, but only if it is no end in itself, but a means to guarantee calm and security. We hear of numerous friends and students who served as court advisors. Epicurus himself may repeatedly warn against political activities,<sup>115</sup> but in the works of his followers, we find reflections on politics, forms of government, and their utility; we even hear of a *De monarchia* authored by Epicurus. As is apparent from the final



sections of the *Adversus Colotem*, Colotes praises (*Adv. Col.* 1124d) those who gave laws, customs, monarchies, and magistracies to man. After all, they provided humanity with security and calm. Without these forms of government, men lived like animals (1124e). This praise of laws and forms of government provides Plutarch with an occasion for criticism, claiming that it is unworthy of a philosopher. After all, the philosophies of real philosophers such as Parmenides, Socrates, or Plato remain intact even without political institutions and enable people to live a just life. After all, their philosophy leads to an esteem for justice for its own sake. The same is apparently not true of Epicurus's philosophy, which considers providence an old wives' tale and finds the Good in customs (1125a). It is for this self-serving reason alone that the Epicureans have to praise laws and forms of government. Thus, Plutarch creates a contrast between Epicurus's teachings on pleasure and the doctrine on the usefulness of government. He who advocates for pleasure needs governmental control and laws. Yet according to the Epicureans, philosophy cannot exercise control and is therefore incapable of providing what the Epicureans strive for: security, calm, and hence pleasure. According to Plutarch, Plato differs in this respect. He (1126b–c) may have composed important texts on laws and forms of government—the *Laws* and the *Republic*—but true security stems from the kind of philosophy he implants in his students' souls.<sup>116</sup> As presented by Plutarch, Epicurus's thesis of an apolitical life as a guarantee for pleasure thus disproves itself. It is not according to the teachings of other philosophers that a secure life is impossible, but according to Epicurus's. Furthermore, the Epicureans are inconsistent in that they praise law, politicians, and rulers at the same time that they advise against politics (1125c–d) and any attempt to save the Greek world in favor of food and drink. Of course, if Plutarch alleges (1127d) that Epicurus would break any law if he felt sure he would not get caught—as Glaucon in Plato's *Republic* claims is true, according to the sophists, of Gyges and any ordinary man<sup>117</sup>—then he ignores the fact that Epicurus, unlike the sophists or Glaucon in the second book of the *Republic*, does not consider people naturally aggressive and simply hungry for power, but takes as his starting point the natural wish to attain happiness, security, and protection (*KD* 6) as well as peace.<sup>118</sup> Here as elsewhere, Plutarch proves an able scholar of Epicurean teachings who does not, however, shy away from modifying these teachings to suit his own rhetorical purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> Hershbell, “Plutarch and Epicureanism,” 3377 n. 93; Einarson and De Lacy, *Plutarch's Moralia*, 175.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Timpe, “Der Epikureismus in der römischen Gesellschaft der Kaiserzeit.”

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Plut. *De cap. ex inim.* 90c; *Per.* 8.2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lamprias-Katalog nr. 80, 129, 133, 143, 148, 159; Roskam, *Commentary on Plutarch's De latenter vivendo*, 85 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Plut. *De sup.* 164f.; *De Is. et Os.* 369a; *De Pyth. or.* 398a–c. 399e–f; *De def. or.* 420b–c, 434c–f; *De Stoic. rep.* 1052b; on *Quaest. conv.* cf. Westman, “Unbeachteter epikureischer Bericht bei Plutarch, *Qu. conviv.* 5,1.”

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Helmbold and O’Neil, *Plutarch’s Quotations*; cf. Boulogne, *Plutarque dans le miroir d’Épicure*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Cf., e.g., *De def. or.* 420a–e, 425c ff., 434d ff.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Plut. *Comp. Cim. Luc.* 1.3; *Caes.* 66; *Brut.* 37; *Pyrrh.* 20, esp. 5–7.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1107e–f.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Erler, “Epicureanism in the Roman Empire.”

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Frg. 2 III 1–5 Smith; on the chair in Epicureanism, see Timpe, “Der Epikureismus in der römischen Gesellschaft der Kaiserzeit,” 56f.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the contributions in Erler, *Epikureismus in der späten Republik und der Kaiserzeit*; Fuhrer and Erler, *Zur Rezeption der hellenistischen Philosophie in der Spätantike*.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Plut. *Demetr.* 34.1–3.

<sup>14</sup> Trans. W. C. Helmbold in Helmbold and O’Neil, *Plutarch’s Quotations*.

<sup>15</sup> Erler, “Philologia medicans.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 613b.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Hershbell, “Plutarch and Epicureanism,” 3355f. On Saturninus, cf. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome*, 57; on other contemporaries, cf. FitzGibbon, “Boethus and Cassius,” 445–60.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Roskam, “Plutarch on Self and Others,” 271 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 396d–e.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ferrari, “La falsità delle asserzioni relative al futuro,” 152 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Plut. *Quaest. conviv.* 635e–36a, 635a–c, 653b, 653c–54b.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Plut. *Non posse* 1086e ff.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Höhle, *Der philosophische Dialog*, 100.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Boulogne, *Plutarque dans le miroir d’Épicure*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Flacelière, “Plutarque et l’épicurisme,” 200; contra Adam, *Plutarchs Schrift*, 3 n. 10; Boulogne, *Plutarque dans le miroir d’Épicure*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Plut. *De amore prolis* 495a.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hershbell, “Plutarch and Epicureanism,” 3374.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Festugière, *Épicure et ses dieux*, 77 ff.; Roskam, “Plutarch as a Source for Epicurean Philosophy” on *De aud. poet.* 37a.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Schmid, “Götter und Menschen in der Theologie Epikurs,” 97 n. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Hershbell, “Plutarch and Epicureanism,” 3356.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Boulogne, *Plutarque dans le miroir d’Épicure*.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Ziegler, *Plutarchos von Chaironeia*, 130 = “Plutarchos von Chaironeia,” 767.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. for instance Plut. *De aud. poet.* 37a = Usener 548; *Non posse* 1090c–d = Usener 532; 1097c–d = Usener 183; 1105e = Usener 213; *Adv. Col.* 1125c = Usener 554; 1127d = Usener 18; *De lat. viv.* 1128a = Usener 551.

<sup>34</sup> For terminology cf. Plut. *De tuend.* 135c–d = Usener 8; *De Stoic. rep.* 1033c = Usener 426. Paraphrases include Plut. *De tranqu. an.* 465f–66a = Usener 555; *Non posse* 1095c–d = Usener 5; 1097a = Usener 544; *Non posse* 1087b = Usener 552; *Adv. Col.* 1127d = Usener 134; Roskam, “Plutarch as a Source for Epicurean Philosophy,” 70 ff.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Westman, *Plutarch gegen Kolotes*, 27–31; Hershbell, “Plutarch and Epicureanism,” 3357.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Boulogne, *Plutarque dans le miroir d’Épicure*, 17.

- <sup>37</sup> Cf. Ziegler, *Plutarchos von Chaironeia*, 130 = “Plutarchos von Chaironeia,” 767.
- <sup>38</sup> Cf. Boulogne, *Plutarque dans le miroir d’Épicure*, 15.
- <sup>39</sup> Cf. Lucr. 6.1002–64.
- <sup>40</sup> Cf. Plut. *Sept. sap. conv.* 159b–160c with Lucr. 3.703–704.
- <sup>41</sup> Cf. Plut. *De frat. am.* 487d = Usener 178.
- <sup>42</sup> Cf. Roskam, *On the Path to Virtue*, 354 ff.; Roskam, “Plutarch as a Source for Epicurean Philosophy.”
- <sup>43</sup> Cf. Hershbell, “Plutarch and Epicureanism,” 3368.
- <sup>44</sup> Cf. Roskam, “Plutarch as a Source for Epicurean Philosophy,” 75.
- <sup>45</sup> Cf. Plut. *Non posse* 1105e = Usener 213; Boulogne, *Plutarque dans le miroir d’Épicure*, 199–213.
- <sup>46</sup> Cf. Hershbell, “Plutarch and Epicureanism”; Boulogne, *Plutarque dans le miroir d’Épicure*; Roskam, *On the Path to Virtue*.
- <sup>47</sup> Cf., for instance, Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1110e–1113d.
- <sup>48</sup> On Plutarch’s place in Middle Platonism, cf. Donini, “L’eredità accademica e i fondamenti del platonismo in Plutarco”; Ferrari, “Plutarco e lo scetticismo ellenistico.”
- <sup>49</sup> Cf. Hershbell, “Plutarch and Epicureanism,” 3370 ff.
- <sup>50</sup> Cf. Boulogne, *Plutarque dans le miroir d’Épicure*, 123 ff.
- <sup>51</sup> Cf. Lucr. 3.417–829.
- <sup>52</sup> Cf. Plut. *De facie* 942c–945c.
- <sup>53</sup> Cf. Plut. *De lat. viv.* 1130c; Berner, “Plutarch und Epikur,” 127.
- <sup>54</sup> Cf. Usener 315.
- <sup>55</sup> Cf. Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1121e–1124c.
- <sup>56</sup> Cf. Roskam, *On the Path to Virtue*; Erler, “Epicureanism in the Roman Empire.”
- <sup>57</sup> Cf. Pelling, “The Moralism of Plutarch’s Lives.”
- <sup>58</sup> Cf. Erler, “Epicurus as ‘deus mortalis.’”
- <sup>59</sup> Essler, *Glücklich und unsterblich*.
- <sup>60</sup> Cf. Plut. *De def. or.* 420b; *De Is. et Os.* 377f, 387f; *Non posse* 1092b; *De Is. et Os.* 369e–372e.
- <sup>61</sup> Cf. Roskam, “Arguments as Boxing Gloves,” 197 ff. For Plutarch’s zetetic philosophy, cf. Plut. *Quaest. Plat.* 999c–1000e; and Opsomer, *In Search of the Truth*, 127–212. For Plutarch’s method of teaching, cf. Roskam, “From Stick to Reasoning.”
- <sup>62</sup> Cf. Plut. *Non posse* 1086d; on intellectual honesty, cf. Plut. *De prof.* 80b–c; on dialogues, cf. Van der Stockt, “Aspects of the Ethics and Poetics.”
- <sup>63</sup> Cf. Cic. *ND* 1.121.
- <sup>64</sup> Cf. Erler, “Epicurus as ‘deus mortalis.’”
- <sup>65</sup> Cf. Ep. SV 64; Usener 471 = Porph. *Marc.* 27. Roskam, *Commentary on Plutarch’s De latenter vivendo*, 17 ff.
- <sup>66</sup> Cf. Roskam, *Plutarch’s Maxime cum principibus philosopho esse disserendum*, 65–6.
- <sup>67</sup> Cf. Roskam, *Commentary on Plutarch’s De latenter vivendo*, 95.
- <sup>68</sup> Cf. Plut. *De garr.* 510c ff.; Beardslee, “De garrulitate”; Plut. *De vit. pud.* 532c; Ingenkamp, *Plutarchs Schriften über die Heilung der Seele*, 99 ff.; Ingenkamp, “Rhetorische und philosophische Mittel der Seelenheilung.”
- <sup>69</sup> Cf. Ep. SV 35; Lucr. 3.14 ff.; Cic. *Ac.* 2.127; Erler, “Exempla amoris”; Essler, *Glücklich und unsterblich*, 88 ff.



- <sup>70</sup> Cf. Tsouna, “Portare davanti agli occhi.”
- <sup>71</sup> Cf. Ingenkamp, *Plutarchs Schriften über die Heilung der Seele*, 88 ff., 99 ff.
- <sup>72</sup> Cf. Castagnoli, *Ancient Self-refutation*.
- <sup>73</sup> Cf. Kechagia, *Plutarch Against Colotes*, 81 ff.
- <sup>74</sup> Plut. *Non posse*, trans. Einarson & De Lacy; cf. Plut. *Non posse* 1108d.
- <sup>75</sup> Cf. Philod. *Ad cont.* 1, col. XVI Angeli; Erler, “Orthodoxie und Anpassung,” 179 ff. On Plutarch’s estimation of *paideia*, e.g., in the *Lives*, cf. Pelling, “Plutarch: Roman Heroes and Greek Culture” and “Rhetoric, Paideia, and Psychology in Plutarch’s Lives.”
- <sup>76</sup> The full title reads: “Reply to Colotes in Defense of the Other Philosophers” (Πρὸς Κωλώτην ὑπὲρ τῶν ἄλλων φιλοσόφων). On this treatise, see most recently Kechagia, *Plutarch against Colotes*.
- <sup>77</sup> Cf. DL 10.25: ἐλλόγιοι. On Colotes, cf. Erler, “Epikur,” 235–43; most recently Kechagia, *Plutarch against Colotes*, 47–80.
- <sup>78</sup> Against the *Lysis*, *P.Herc.* 208; against the *Euthydemus*, *P.Herc.* 1032, edition in Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemus*, 163–70 and 5–7. Revised readings by A. Concolino Mancini, “Sulle opere polemiche di Colote”; and Alesse, “La polemica di Colote”; Kechagia, *Plutarch against Colotes*, 55–68 focuses on Menedemus.
- <sup>79</sup> Cf. Macr. *Somn.* 1.1.9–1.2.5; Procl. *In R.* II pp. 105.23–106.16, 109.11–12, 113.9, 116.19, 121.24 Kroll. Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemus*, 12 suspects the title was Πρὸς τοὺς Πλάτωνος μύθους or Περὶ τῶν παρὰ Πλάτωνι μυθικῶς πεπλασμένων. Cf. Kechagia, *Plutarch against Colotes*, 68–79.
- <sup>80</sup> Cf. Clay, “Diogenes of Oenoanda,” 2527.
- <sup>81</sup> Cf. Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1107e.
- <sup>82</sup> Cf. Cic. *ND* 1.93.
- <sup>83</sup> Cf. Hershbell, “Plutarch and Epicureanism,” 3361 ff.
- <sup>84</sup> Cf. Westman, *Plutarch gegen Kolotes*, 39 ff.
- <sup>85</sup> Cf. Usener 219; *Ep. Men.* 122.
- <sup>86</sup> Westman, *Plutarch gegen Kolotes*, 115.
- <sup>87</sup> Cf. Westman, *Plutarch gegen Kolotes*, 112.
- <sup>88</sup> Cf. Plat. *Tht.* 170e–171b; Arist. *Rh.* 1398a3–4; Castagnoli, *Ancient Self-refutation*.
- <sup>89</sup> Zacher, *Plutarchs Kritik an der Lustlehre Epikurs*.
- <sup>90</sup> Cf. Plut. *Non posse* 1097a, 1099d, 1099f–1100a.
- <sup>91</sup> Cf. Roskam, *On the Path to Virtue*, 361.
- <sup>92</sup> Cf. Adam, *Plutarchs Schrift*, 13–18.
- <sup>93</sup> Cf. Einarson and De Lacy, *Plutarch’s Moralia*, 4–6.
- <sup>94</sup> Cf. Arist. *EN* 1095b17–19.
- <sup>95</sup> Cf. Roskam, *Commentary on Plutarch’s De latenter vivendo*; Erler, “Utopie und Realität” and “Epikur und politische Aktivität.”
- <sup>96</sup> Cf. Roskam, *Plutarch’s Maxime cum principibus philosopho esse disserendum*.
- <sup>97</sup> Cf. Plat. *R.* 415a–b.
- <sup>98</sup> Cf. Plut. *De tranqu. anim.* 465f–466a = Usener 555; *De tuend. san.* 135b–d; Roskam, “The Displeasing Secrets of the Epicurean Life.”
- <sup>99</sup> Cf. Plut. *Comp. Cim. Luc.* 1.3.
- <sup>100</sup> Cf. Roskam, *Commentary on Plutarch’s De latenter vivendo*.
- <sup>101</sup> Cf. Plut. *Non posse* 1107c.

- <sup>102</sup> Cf. Plut. *De tranq. anim.* 465c = Democritus, 68B3 DK.
- <sup>103</sup> Cf. Roskam, *On the Path to Virtue*, 363.
- <sup>104</sup> Cf. Plut. *De tranq. anim.* 465f–466a = Usener 555.
- <sup>105</sup> Cf. Arrighetti, *Poeti, eruditi e biografì*, 139–228.
- <sup>106</sup> Cf. Plut. *De prof. virt.* 76a–b.
- <sup>107</sup> Cf. DL 10.119 = Usener 8; see also Erler, “Utopie und Realität,” 40.
- <sup>108</sup> Cf. Philod. *Mort.* 4, col. 38.16 ff. Henry: *ἐντεταφιασμένοιο βίος*; see also Erler, “Leben wie im Leichentuch.”
- <sup>109</sup> Cf. Barigazzi, *Studi su Plutarco*, 115 ff.; Roskam, *On the Path to Virtue*, 351 ff.; Plut. *De tranq. anim.* 465f–466a = Usener 555.
- <sup>110</sup> Cf. Roskam, *On the Path to Virtue*, 355.
- <sup>111</sup> Cf. Barigazzi, “Una declamazione di Plutarco contro Epicuro,” 45–64; Russell, *Plutarch. Selected Essays and Dialogues*, 120.
- <sup>112</sup> Cf. Long, “Pleasure and Social Utility,” esp. 294 ff.
- <sup>113</sup> Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 21.22.
- <sup>114</sup> Cf. Barigazzi, “Sul concetto epicureo della sicurezza esterna.”
- <sup>115</sup> Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 21.3 = Usener 132; *Ep.* 22.5–6 = Usener 133.
- <sup>116</sup> Cf. Plat. *Phdr.* 276e.
- <sup>117</sup> Plat. *R.* 359c–369d, 612b.
- <sup>118</sup> Cf. *KD* 6, 8, 40.

## CHAPTER 21

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# DIOGENES OF OENOANDA

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PAMELA GORDON

IN or around the second century CE, Epicurean evangelism materialized in a spectacularly unlikely form: a massive limestone inscription. The contents—including treatises on *Ethics*, *Physics*, and *Old Age*—make the inscription unique, but its size is also unparalleled anywhere in the ancient world. Although only a fraction of the text has been recovered, Smith estimates that the inscription may have originally been 80 meters or 260 feet in length, with over 25,000 words spread across 260 square meters.<sup>1</sup> Apparently the project of a single person—the otherwise unknown Diogenes of Oenoanda—this monument contains Epicurean texts (all in Greek) that have no exact equivalents elsewhere. But the inscription is even more significant to the history of Epicureanism, as it provides glimpses of a lost Epicurean community, sheds light on the formation of Epicurean texts, and attests to the diversity of the social and cultural contexts of Epicureanism.

The remains of this monument were first discovered in 1884, in the city of Oenoanda in the hills of northern Lycia in Asia Minor (now Turkey, near the modern village of Incealiler). Originally part of a stoa (perhaps an architectural pun) that apparently stood in a prominent position at or near the center of what was a flourishing city, the stones were dismantled in

antiquity, sometimes to be reused with the inscribed side hidden from view. Smith's dating of Diogenes's inscription to around the 120s CE has become the convention, though Clay places it in the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–80), and Hall tentatively in the late second or early third century CE.<sup>2</sup> Clay was persuaded largely by the possible mention in the inscription of a contemporary of Marcus Aurelius as well as by his sense that Diogenes would be at home in the world described in Lucian's *Alexander the False Prophet*.<sup>3</sup> Smith compares the appearance of the lettering of Diogenes's inscription to another, securely dated monument, and posits that the same stone mason worked on both jobs. This other inscription in Oenoanda announces an extravagant benefaction by one C. Julius Demosthenes, and includes a letter from the emperor Hadrian dated August 29, 124 CE and other documents from the same era.<sup>4</sup>

Unconstrained by his improbable medium, Diogenes projects a distinctive voice, “shouting” the Epicurean message “to all Greeks and non-Greeks” (fr. 32).<sup>5</sup> Possessing the properties of a billboard, an archive, a philosophical handbook, an imposing commemorative monument, and something akin to a shrine, the inscription includes epitomes on *Physics* and *Ethics*, a discourse on *Old Age*, a collection of the Epicurean *Key Doctrines* (the *Kyriai Doxai*), a set of original *Maxims*, and Diogenes's instructions to his family and friends (perhaps to be understood as a will). In addition, there is a collection of other writings that seems to include letters authored by Diogenes as well as some by (or purportedly by) Epicurus. All of the texts except for the *Key Doctrines* are inscribed in courses of narrow columns, as though displayed on unfurled papyrus rolls. Studied imitation of Epicurus is apparent throughout, particularly in Diogenes's selection of philosophical genres favored by Epicurus: the epitome, the epistle, and the maxim.<sup>6</sup> The fragments of the *Ethics* epitome discovered thus far include discussions of dreams, desire, fate, fear of the gods, pleasure, pain, the soul, the swerve of the atoms, and virtue. The *Physics* fragments include criticisms of anthropocentric teleology, divination, and rival schools; and discussions of astronomy, the atom, dreams, epistemology, theology, vision, and the origins of civilization and language. Other texts contain information about Diogenes's life and Epicurean recruitment, and treat topics relevant to the *Physics* and *Ethics*. Diogenes's biography emerges from several fragments that tell of travels to meet with Epicureans in Athens, Chalcis,

and Boeotia; failing health and a diet of curdled milk; a winter spent in Rhodes; and his likely imminent death. Diogenes's persona is intertwined with the Epicurean mission, as he reveals his friendships, his interest in prospective adherents, his equanimity despite illness and old age, and his remarkably altruistic outlook.<sup>7</sup> The writing is clear but highly stylized, with rhythmical clauses and frequent hyperbaton.

It is unclear whether the inscribed stoa provided a backdrop to daily life and commerce, or whether Diogenes conceived it as a resting place to which interested readers would withdraw. Reading the entire wall(s) is likely to have been difficult, particularly if Smith is correct to envision seven horizontal courses, with the top line of the highest course around 3.25 meters above ground level.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, Diogenes stresses the intended efficacy of his inscription (fr. 2, 3, and 29), and asks his audience not to read like passers-by, "in a patchy fashion" (fr. 30). Diogenes implies that not everyone can receive his Epicurean wisdom when he writes that his help is offered to *τοῖς ἐϋσυνκρίτοις* (fr. 2 and 3). Here Diogenes uses a previously unattested word that may indicate "people who are discriminating." But it is more likely that he is using Epicurean scientific vocabulary to refer to people who have a "well-compounded" atomic structure.<sup>9</sup>

## MOTIVATION AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

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Some of Diogenes's texts were composed for this particular context. This is clear from Diogenes's reference to his medium when he explains his motives: "I wished to use this stoa to advertise publicly the [medicines] that bring salvation" (fr. 3). In an apparent epilogue (perhaps a coda to his set of *Maxims* rather than to the inscription as a whole), he also writes that he has "turned so many letters ... into stone" (*τὰ τοσαῦτα ἐλίθο. ποιήσαμεν γράμματα*, fr. 116 = NF 81). Unexpectedly expansive, he explains that he wants to share Epicureanism now because he is at the end of his life. He adds (fr. 3):

Now, if only one person or two or three or four or five or six or any larger number you choose, sir, provided that it is not very large, were in a bad predicament, I should address them individually and do all in my power to give them the best advice.

But the need is great: the majority of people suffer from a common disease, as in a plague, with their false notions about things, and their number is increasing (for in mutual emulation they catch the disease from one another, like sheep, fr. 3). The medical metaphor is well known from Epicurean sources, including Lucretius (*DRN* 4.11–25) and the Epicurean *tetrapharmakos*, or “four-part cure” for human suffering.<sup>10</sup> At this point the text does not identify any particular “false notions about things” (τῇ περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ψευδοδοξία, fr. 3), and it is unclear whether Diogenes is referring to a new development in his particular historical moment or to his perception of a more general decline in understanding about the nature of the world. Other fragments yield several indications that false notions about the relationship between the gods and humanity are a particular concern.

Diogenes’s inscription occupies a position that is at once firmly within and apart from dominant currents in second-century culture. Expertise in traditional Greek culture—and the elaborate public performance of such *paideia*—was highly valued throughout Asia Minor during this era of Roman rule, and Epicurus was born just early enough to represent the illustrious Hellenic and specifically Athenian past.<sup>11</sup> Diogenes displays his own Hellenic identity freely, and there may be an aspect of “cultural archaism” not just in his admiration for Epicurus, but in his mentions of Homer, Alcman, Archilochus, Thales, Anaxagoras, Sophocles, Socrates, Plato, and the Olympic games.<sup>12</sup> Despite the unconventional subject matter, Diogenes’s choice of medium also befits the epigraphic boom of the first to early third centuries CE. Even the monument’s immense size suits its cultural milieu.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the type of building—whether Diogenes was responsible for the stoa itself or just the inscription—was a highly favored benefaction, and a desirable urban amenity. In fact, euergetism and epigraphy went hand in glove in Oenoanda and throughout Asia Minor. Displayed most likely in the near vicinity of Diogenes’s stoa was the 117-line Hadrianic inscription that may have been carved by the same stone mason(s). This inscription records the establishment of the Demostheneia, an elaborate weeks-long musical and theatrical festival to take place every five years. The same stones reveal that the eponymous benefactor had already provided three stoas and a market.<sup>14</sup>

Diogenes’s eagerness to do something “philanthropic” (φιλόανθρωπον, frs. 3 and 119) establishes his connection with the euergetism that was so

much a part of Greek urban life in the eastern provinces.<sup>15</sup> But there are radical differences between Diogenes's benefaction and his elite contemporaries' offerings of baths, theaters, and stoas. Instead of a festival or an urban structure, Diogenes offers the salve (*φάρμακα*, fr. 3) of philosophy. The motivations for conventional euergetism were likely diverse, but included the desire for social status, prestige, and the maintenance of elite political power.<sup>16</sup> Diogenes's stated altruistic goal and his traditionally Epicurean determination to abstain from politics provide a stark contrast, as does his disparagement of the baths (and perhaps theaters).<sup>17</sup> The implied critique of conventional euergetism seems especially clear when we note the valorization of public engagement in inscriptions that honor benefactors, including the major inscription that commemorates Diogenes's contemporary or near-contemporary Opramoas of Rhodiapolis, who had made many benefactions throughout Lycia, apparently including a bath building in Oenoanda.<sup>18</sup> Diogenes's condemnation of divination also undermines the contemporary practice of inscribing oracular responses. As Warren writes:

Epigraphy is clearly the medium in which civic values were projected at this time, and so Diogenes uses this very medium on a gargantuan scale to launch his counter-attack.<sup>19</sup>

For Clay, Diogenes's "militantly philosophical" inscription secures his membership in a second-century subculture that "distanced itself and defined itself against the dominant civic, religious, and philosophical culture of its age."<sup>20</sup>

Does Diogenes's extravagant public display of Epicurean wisdom violate the traditionally Epicurean mottoes "live unknown" (*λάθῃ βιώσας*) and "do not participate in public affairs" (*μὴ πολιτεύεσθαι*)?<sup>21</sup> Roskam sees here a "puzzling paradox," but concludes that Diogenes's establishment of a public monument does not undermine any Epicurean commitment to quietism.<sup>22</sup> In any case, Diogenes seems to have included the following to avoid the impression of a contradiction (fr. 3):

In this way, [citizens,] even though I am not engaging in public affairs (*καὶ οὐ πολὺ [εἰ]τε νόμιμος*), I say these things through the inscription just as if I were taking action.



## METHODOLOGY AND INTERPRETATION

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Expectations about Epicurean positions frequently shape interpretation of the inscription, and editors have often filled lacunae by referring to the texts of Epicurus or Lucretius.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, Diogenes sometimes serves as a source for otherwise lost doctrines of Epicurus. It is difficult to challenge these strategies, as secure proof of Diogenes's deviations from Epicurus's original teachings can be elusive. Furthermore, in contrast to Philodemus's allegiance to the authority of *οἱ ἄνδρες* ("The Men," the first-generation leaders Epicurus, Metrodorus, *Hermarchus*, and Polyaenus), it appears that Diogenes saw himself as a follower solely of Epicurus. So far, no other names of "The Men" appear at Oenoanda, but Epicurus is named eight times if we count one certain and one uncertain reference to "son of Neocles."<sup>24</sup>

But if Lucretius is an Epicurean fundamentalist, Diogenes is not.<sup>25</sup> That Diogenes is not delivering wisdom straight from the books of Epicurus is clear at the very least from Diogenes's seven references to "the Stoics" and from his upbraiding of "Zeno and Cleanthes and you, Chrysippus" in a fragment first published in 2011 (NF 192). Here Diogenes asserts that the Epicurean *telos* is not the pleasures of "the masses," as the Stoics claim, but is like the Stoic *telos*, though the Stoics "hate the name of pleasure" (NF 192). Extant texts by Epicurus do not engage his Stoic contemporaries, and Chrysippus, without whom "there would have been no Stoa" (DL 7.183), was around ten years old when Epicurus died in 270 BCE. Thus, Diogenes's polemics against rival views clearly included updated information. Although Greek antisemitism can be traced back to Epicurus's era, Diogenes's contempt for the Jewish people also fits a Roman imperial rather than Hellenistic context (fr. 126). In addition, an innovative approach seems most likely to be at play where Diogenes expresses his altruistic mission (frr. 2 and 3), and where he imagines a world in which everyone has become an Epicurean (fr. 56).

## THE FLUIDITY OF EPICUREAN TEXTS

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But if we set aside questions regarding Diogenes's doctrinal orthodoxy or heterodoxy, what is clear is that Diogenes recasts Epicurean positions in unique reformulations. The inscription is not a commentary on Epicurus's writing, but a retelling and creative endorsement of Epicurean theory. Centuries earlier, Epicurus had written that "it is better for you to lie on a bed of straw and have no worries than to have a golden couch and luxurious table."<sup>26</sup> He also advised *Menoceus* (*Ep. Men.* 132):

It is neither continuous drinking parties nor physical enjoyment of boys and women, or fish or other elements of a lavish banquet that produce a pleasant life, but sober reasoning and searching out reasons for choice and avoidance.

Diogenes improvises idiosyncratic illustrations of these basic principles. For example, after mentioning the Epicurean goal for happiness, he writes (fr. 29):

The identity of this goal, and how neither wealth can furnish it, nor political fame, nor royal office, nor a life of luxury and sumptuous banquets, nor pleasures of choice love-affairs, nor anything else, while philosophy [alone can secure it], we [shall now explain ...].

Conjuring a Roman villa, a new fragment mentions "an elaborate house with fretted and gold-spangled ceilings" as something to be avoided, recommending instead simple clothing and food, particularly cabbage (NF 136). Also updating Epicurus's instructions to an imperial context, Diogenes contrasts the Epicurean pleasure of studying philosophy with some pleasures offered by typical benefactions (fr. 2):

Joy [of real value is generated not by theaters] and [... and] baths [and perfumes] and ointments [which we] have left to [the] masses, [but by natural science ...].

Although Smith's restoration is conjectural, the word "theater" is likely, and "masses" and "baths" are certain. Bendlin suggests that Diogenes's rejection of these conventional imperial era benefactions may have been "truly subversive."<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, Diogenes's critique of anthropocentric teleology in the *Physics* also displays his ability to illustrate an Epicurean premise with fresh variations. Among his proofs of an inhospitable world are the saltiness of the sea "as if it had been purposely made like this by the god to prevent men from drinking" (fr. 21); and the existence of "the so-called Dead Sea,

which is really and truly dead (for it is never sailed)” (fr. 21).<sup>28</sup> In NF 182, Diogenes questions the perfection of a world that has hostile weather and darkness: “Let anyone say in what way a thunderbolt benefits life,” and “in what way night, when we can [well rest throughout the] day.” He concludes: “For of these phenomena some are useless, others even harmful” (NF 182).

The Oenoanda inscription also provides insight into the nature and use of the *Key Doctrines*. The monument displays the sayings conspicuously, in a nearly continuous, single-line frieze that adds a fifteenth line to the *Ethics*, which is carved on the same stones in smaller letters and organized in narrow fourteen-line columns. In this running fifteenth line, at least thirteen *Key Doctrines* are recognizable, despite departures from Diogenes Laertius’s text that suggest simplification for memorization and recitation.<sup>29</sup> However, at least seven of these *Key Doctrines* are unique to Oenoanda, and one resembles a saying in the collection known as the *Sententiae Vaticanae* that is not preserved by Diogenes Laertius. Nonetheless, all of these sayings are displayed uniformly, as though they belong to a single text. This strongly supports Snyder’s view that Epicurean texts are “a sinuous, evolving entity,” even when Epicurus was perceived as the ultimate source, as was apparently the case with the *Key Doctrines*.<sup>30</sup> Thus it seems reasonable to view the fifteenth line as an Oenoandan version of the *Key Doctrines* rather than a mash-up that Diogenes and his Epicurean readers would have viewed as only partly canonical. The possibility that Diogenes himself is not responsible for the expansion of the *Key Doctrines* is suggested by his sequestering of his own *Maxims* in multi-line columns elsewhere. Fragments of the inscription also demonstrate that the sayings in the fifteenth line of the *Ethics* were sometimes relevant to the text above, thus strongly suggesting that Diogenes used the *Key Doctrines* to validate or “underwrite” his own treatises.<sup>31</sup>

## OTHER SELECTED FRAGMENTS AND RECENT DISCOVERIES

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## Fragments 2, 3, 29, 30, 32, and 119 and NF 207: Cosmopolitanism and an Epicurean Altruism

Faced with human suffering, Diogenes considers it the responsibility of any good man (*χρηστός τις ἄνθρωπος*) to run to his contemporaries' aid (an intervention he expresses with the pun *ἐπικουρῶ*) (fr. 2). His concern for others extends to the future (fr. 3):

[It is] right to help [also] generations to come (for they too belong to us, though they are still unborn); and, besides, love of humanity prompts us to aid also the foreigners who come here.

According to Clement of Alexandria, Epicurus had asserted that Greeks alone are capable of philosophy (*Strom.* 1.15), but Diogenes hopes to reach “those who are called foreigners, though they are not really so.” He continues: “The whole compass of this world gives all people a single country, the entire earth, and a single home, the world” (fr. 30). This “warm supranationalism”<sup>32</sup> may be attributable to Cynic or Stoic influence, but it accords well with the range of cosmopolitan values expressed by (e.g.) Dio Chrysostom, Aelius Aristides, Lucian, and Philostratus. Diogenes’s unexpectedly altruistic outlook, and his concern not only for non-Greeks but also for future generations, has no parallels in other Epicurean texts. At another point he addresses his fellow citizens (*ὦ πολῖται*), reminding them that he has established his inscription not for his own sake, “but as a means of salvation (*σωτήριον*) for you” (fr. 29 and NF 207). It is difficult to reconcile these fragments with a purely egoistic hedonism, and they raise the question: Does Diogenes expand our understanding of the utilitarian perspective in Epicurean ethics, or has Diogenes himself expanded Epicureanism?

## Fragments 9, 10, and 24: The Nature of Dreams

Here in the *Physics* Diogenes asserts that dreams “are not empty illusions of the mind, as the Stoics hold” (fr. 10). Apparently arguing against Democritus’s view that dreams are sent by the gods, Diogenes writes that

Democritus “endows them with a power which they do *not* have” (fr. 10). These fragments accord with Epicurus (*Ep. Hdt.* 51) and Lucretius (*DRN* 4.26–44, 4.722–822, and 4.962–1036). Regarding the way dreams seem real, Diogenes cites sexual pleasure derived from dreams, and the phenomenon of a dreamer’s springing up when dreaming of falling from a precipice (fr. 10). Diogenes criticizes Antiphon’s oneiromancy and his claim that the gods send ambiguous dreams that require skilled interpreters (fr. 24).<sup>33</sup> Bendlin suggests that a second-century tendency to regard dreams as “a preferred medium of divine communication” is the context for Diogenes’s scientific and anti-theological approach.<sup>34</sup> There was great enthusiasm for dream interpretation in the second century, as is clear from the *Sacred Tales* of Aelius Aristides, and from Artemidorus’s *Oneirocritica*, which collected material from dream diviners around the world. Dreams are also treated in fr. 125 and 126.

## **Fragment 13: On Alternative Explanations**

In defense of the Epicurean practice of suggesting more than one explanation for natural phenomena, Diogenes says that it is “reckless” to be dogmatic: “such a procedure is characteristic of a seer rather than a wise man.”

## **Fragment 16: On Atheism**

It is not the Epicureans who deny the existence of the gods, but other philosophers, such as Diogoras and Pythagoras.<sup>35</sup>

## **Fragment 19: Images of the Gods**

Diogenes offers a unique response to the traditional iconographies of the divinities. Instead of representing a divinity with weapons, or attended by

wild beasts, “we ought to make statues of the gods genial and smiling, so that we may smile back at them rather than be afraid of them.” He continues: “Well then ... let us reverence the gods.” Clay compares this fragment to Dio Chrysostom’s “exalted interpretation” of the effect on the viewer of Pheidias’s cult statue of Zeus in his Olympian Oration of 97 CE (Or. 12). Regarding Diogenes, Clay adds: “The philosopher’s smile before the statues of radiant and joyous gods is a new feature of the Epicurean aspiration of coming to resemble the Epicurean gods.”<sup>36</sup>

## Fragment 23 and New Fragment 143: Critiques of Oracular Prophecy

In response to the story of Croesus’s querying of Delphi about his designs on the empire of Cyrus (*Ep. Hdt.* 1.53), Diogenes asks (NF 143):

Why does he (Apollo) give oracles to any who want them against those who have committed no sin, either big or small, against him? For this is incompatible with the majesty of a god.

Diogenes adds that this traditional account, which says that Croesus dedicated large quantities of gold to Delphi, portrays Apollo as a taker of bribes. Also in connection with traditional oracles recorded by Herodotus, Diogenes writes in a fragment that was probably adjacent that people have suffered great misfortunes “on account of this ambiguity and intricate obliqueness of oracles” (fr. 23). The second-century Cynic Oenomaus of Gadara also uses the Herodotean *locus classicus* in his argument against oracular prophecy.

Diogenes Laertius records that Epicurus rejected all types of divination (DL 10.135), but oracular prophecy in particular may not have concerned him, as Delphi and other oracular centers were comparatively inactive during the Hellenistic era (later remarked by Cicero in *De Divinatione* 2.117). But epigraphical evidence and texts such as Lucian’s *Alexander the False Prophet* indicate a sharp rise in oracular activity in Asia Minor during the first centuries CE.<sup>37</sup> Bendlin views the revival of the oracles at sites such as Claros as indicative of a “rhetoric of tradition” and a “successful export

of Greek culture” to Asia Minor.<sup>38</sup> Epigraphical evidence demonstrates that there was an oracle to Apollo in Oenoanda.<sup>39</sup> Thus Diogenes’s words are apparently his own Epicurean critique of contemporary practice, just as Lucretius’s deprecation of Roman or Etruscan augury (e.g. *Lucr. DRN* 6.83–89) is a Romanized illustration of Epicurus’s general teachings about the gods. These discussions of oracular prophecy were probably contiguous to Diogenes’s criticism of Antiphon, who claimed that dreams were another type of god-sent message (fr. 24).

## Fragment 54: The Swerve of the Atom

Diogenes is our only source for the Greek vocabulary for the swerve:

Do you [not] know, whoever you are, that there is actually a free movement in the atoms, which Democritus failed to discover, but Epicurus brought to light—a swerving (*παρὲνκλιτικήν*) movement, as he proves from phenomena?

As in Lucretius (*DRN* 2.216–93), the swerve prevents the existence of fate (*εἰμαρμένη*, mentioned twice in fr. 54).

## Fragment 56: An Epicurean Golden Age

An extraordinary fragment of the *Ethics* holds out the possibility of an Epicurean future when humankind will take up the life of the gods. Perhaps not everyone is able to achieve wisdom, but if we assume that it is possible, “then truly the life of the gods will pass to men” (*τότε ὡς ἀληθῶς ὁ τῶν θεῶν βίος εἰς ἀνθρώπους μεταβήσεται*). People will have no slaves, but will study philosophy and farm together. In that world, everything will be “full of justice and mutual love (*φιλαλληλίας*),” and there will be no need of fortifications or laws. Although striving toward the happiness of the gods was an Epicurean ideal, no other text visualizes an Epicurean utopia. Clay notes that the fragment is especially noteworthy considering its context in “a high mountain city whose most remarkable monuments are its walls.”<sup>40</sup>



He notes also the sad irony that Diogenes's inscription was reused to build an apparently much-needed defensive wall, perhaps only a century later.

## **Fragments 62–67: The Infinity of the Worlds**

These fragments from the *Letter to Antipater* combine two philosophical genres: the epistle and the dialogue. In form, this letter recalls Epicurus's *Letter to Pythocles*, in that both texts respond to a request from an eager student for a natural science lesson. But here the epistolarity is more overt than in any of the three Epicurean epistles preserved by Diogenes Laertius, which offer no information about the disposition, future plans, or geographical location of the writer. It has snowed in Oenoanda, and Diogenes is writing from Rhodes. Although old age or a reversal of fortune may prevent him, he hopes to meet with Antipater in the spring at Athens (or perhaps at Chalcis or Thebes). Antipater's request for information about an infinite number of worlds (τὰ περὶ ἀπειρίας κόσμων) has come at an opportune time, as Diogenes has just discussed the topic with his friend (ἑταῖρος) Theodoridas of Lindos, with whom Antipater is familiar (fr. 63). Theodoridas has just begun his studies (ἀρχόμενος ἔτι τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν, fr. 63). Diogenes records the gist of their dialogue, which began with "O Diogenes." Most of the dialogue has not been found, but we can see that Diogenes dismisses received opinion and laughs at rival philosophies (καταγελῶ, fr. 65).

## **Fragment 117: To His Relatives, Family, and Friends**

This fragment, in which Diogenes mentions his illness and the possibility of imminent death, sounds like the opening to a will. The preservation of Epicurus's own will by Diogenes Laertius demonstrates its importance as a traditional Epicurean document, so this would be in keeping with Diogenes's imitation of Epicurus elsewhere (DL 10.16). The reference to personal suffering also recalls Epicurus's letter to Idomeneus (DL 10.22).

## Fragments 125–26: The Letter to Mother

Addressing his mother (ὦ μήτηρ, twice), someone explains that the mechanics of dreams are like the mechanics of sight: images of absent people have the same power as images of those who are present (fr. 125). Here the context is the writer's knowledge of his mother's disturbing dreams about her apparently distant son. Combating fear with a natural science lesson is an essential Epicurean technique; the brief explanation accords with the theory of dreams as explained in fr. 9 and 10. The writer assures her that he is enjoying a godlike happiness (ὁμοίως τοῖς θεοῖς χαίρομεν, fr. 125), and asks her to stop sending supplies (χορηγιῶν); he does not want her to go without for his sake (fr. 126). He has plenty, as "the friends" and his father often send money, and the latter has just sent nine minas via Cleon.

Most scholars take this as a letter from Epicurus, but some posit that Diogenes could be the author.<sup>41</sup> A third possibility is that the letter is a pseudepigraphical text in the voice of a young Epicurus.<sup>42</sup> That Epicurus is the purported or actual author is supported by the characterization elsewhere of Epicurus's mother as superstitious, the reference to minas rather than to denarii (which are mentioned in other inscriptions in Oenoanda), and the mention of Cleon, who figures as the messenger mentioned in the *Letter to Pythocles* (DL 10.84).<sup>43</sup> In favor of Diogenes's authorship, Hoffman argues that the sentence structure and clausulae match Diogenes's writings.<sup>44</sup> But the letter has attributes in common with pseudepigraphical epistolary texts attributed to other philosophers and luminaries of the Greek past. Particularly relevant here is the letter collection attributed to Chion of Heraclea (future tyrannicide and a budding follower of Platonism), which includes the young man's assurance that he is engaged in the pursuit of virtue, a plea that his father console his mother, and his demurring response to his parents' financial support.<sup>45</sup> Modestly refused gifts are also a theme in letters attributed to Solon, Socrates, Diogenes the Cynic, and Crates (many of which are first- or second-century CE creations).<sup>46</sup>

## Fragments 137–79, and New Fragments 133, 211, and 212: *Old Age*

Diogenes begins by chastising young men who criticize old age, the virtues of which Diogenes defends. From the surviving words “βουλὴν δ[ ] μεγαθύμ[ ] ρόντων” (fr. 142), it is clear that Diogenes quotes a Homeric line about the council of elders gathering by Nestor’s ship (βουλὴν δὲ πρῶτον μεγαθύμων ἔζε γερόντων, *Iliad* 2.53). He may also quote a line about the Trojan elders (*Il.* 3.150). In Smith’s reconstruction of fr. 142, Diogenes also quotes Agamemnon’s praise of Nestor at *Il.* 2.370. Diogenes expresses exasperation with the way weakening eyesight is exaggerated into “blindness” (fr. 145). He also discusses coughing (fr. 144), hardness of hearing (NF 133), and loss of teeth, which can be accommodated with liquid foods (NF 211). Clay posits that this treatise, whose topmost lines were at least 3.25 meters above ground level, was broken into small fragments when the stoa was dismantled: “the higher the course, the less survives.”<sup>47</sup>

## New Fragments 126–27: On Jews and Egyptians

A crack in Diogenes’s otherwise charming persona emerged in 1997 with the discovery of a fragment that identifies two peoples as the most superstitious, or, literally, “the most fearful of divine power.” In accordance with the Epicurean view that fear of the gods is a human failing, Diogenes writes (NF 126):

A clear indication of the complete inability of the gods to prevent wrong-doings is provided by the nations of the Jews and Egyptians, who, as well as being the most superstitious (δεισιδαιμονέστατοι) of all peoples, are the vilest (μαρρώτατοι) of all peoples.

Diogenes may have in mind traditional lore about Jews and Christians such as their alleged cannibalism.<sup>48</sup> Or perhaps Diogenes’s sentiment is shaped by fresh memories of the violent Jewish revolt of 115–18 or the second great revolt in Palestine in 132–35 CE.<sup>49</sup> Also possibly relevant are the

polemics against Epicureanism of the Jewish scholars Philo (20 BCE–50 CE) and Josephus (37–c. 100 CE). But why the association between Jews and Egyptians? In Rome both groups were sometimes regarded as practitioners of particularly objectionable cults.<sup>50</sup> It is also possible that Diogenes’s indictment of Jews and Egyptians is “an Epicurean counter to the Stoic, and then Middle Platonist, tendency to regard precisely these two nations as exemplifying the claim that barbarian philosophies contained elements of the true religion of primal times.”<sup>51</sup>

## **New Fragment 130: Death is Like a Frightening Mask**

This is one of the monolithic *Maxims*, each of which was displayed as a single, discrete column. Having asserted that life becomes sweet once the fear of death is removed, the writer (probably Diogenes) continues: “Death is to be laughed at, being like a mask that frightens small children; for indeed they believe that it will bite, but it does not bite.”

## **New Fragment 157: On Erotic Desire**

First discovered in 2008, this nearly complete monolithic *Maxim* is relevant to any discussion of Epicurean attitudes toward sexuality. Here Diogenes says that lovers (“those who are sick with the passion of love”) are unaware “that they derive pleasure to the highest degree from looking even without copulation.” For Smith, Diogenes’s position on sex is “generally orthodox.”<sup>52</sup> But Hammerstaedt finds Diogenes’s “positive attitude to the pleasure obtained from looking at an attractive person” at odds with Lucretius’s exposé of the insalubrious connection between vision and desire in his polemic against erotic love (Lucr. *DRN* 4.1037–1287).<sup>53</sup> For Lucretius, images of the beloved are deceptive and unsatisfying, but Diogenes presents the beholding of beauty as an untainted pleasure.

## **New Fragment 186: Women as Epicurean Students or Adherents**

This fragment, apparently belonging to a letter, adds a small but significant piece of evidence for the existence of female followers. Nearly a full column of NF 186 is well preserved, and one feminine pronoun and one feminine participle are clearly legible:

... [I shall try to help them (?)] [in every] way, when I can. As you know, we do not have better things to offer them (N.B. “them” is feminine) than our own good fare. For indeed they happen already to have done some tasting of the doctrines of Epicurus, but to be sure not in such a way that [the disturbances] that strike [them have been removed].

The unnamed addressee seems likely to be an Epicurean, and “our own good fare” may refer to Epicurean philosophy. Diogenes also refers to his convalescence under a woman’s care in Rhodes, and it is tempting to identify her as a member of his circle of Epicurean friends.

## **New Fragment 207: Usefulness of the Inscription to People of All Ages**

Here in the *Ethics* Diogenes says that he expects the inscription to be useful to: “Those of you who are young, still at the beginning of your lives and as it were standing at a crossroads, being apprehensive about what kind of road they will travel” as well as to those who are already old; and to those who are in between. Epicurus declares that philosophy is beneficial to young and old alike in the *Letter to Menoeceus* (122).

## **New Fragment 209: A Letter about Cheerfulness at Death**

Addressed to a group, these closing lines from a letter assert that it is not possible to die twice; so living twice is not possible either. It closes with: “We should be cheerful (εὐθυμητέον) when we die, for we shall give up not only good things but also bad ones. Farewell.” Smith notes that the dimensions and format of the lettering of this fragment are unique, and its place in the inscription is unknown. Hammerstaedt and Smith consider the possibility that Epicurus rather than Diogenes “is the (pseudepigraphic?) author.”<sup>54</sup>

## STONES, TEXTS, AND EDITIONS

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Many of the known fragments are stored securely on site, but others remain scattered around the environs, and a few have not been relocated since the inscription was first discovered. In 2007, the Deutsches Archäologisches Institute, Istanbul, began a new survey-project in Oenoanda. By 2017, eighty-three new fragments were discovered (some of them quite substantial), bringing the total number of known fragments to 306. Diogenes’s recent editors estimate that these represent “much less than half” of the inscription, and have expressed optimism that more fragments will soon be discovered.<sup>55</sup> All of the fragments discovered or re-deciphered since 2003 have been published nearly annually by J. Hammerstaedt and/or M. F. Smith. Most are reprinted in Hammerstaedt and Smith, *The Epicurean Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda*, but the latest new fragments appear in the journal *Epigraphica Anatolica*. The most up-to-date book-length editions of Diogenes of Oenoanda are published by Smith (*Diogenes of Oinoanda* and *Supplement to Diogenes of Oinoanda*). All of these editions include commentary and English translation. Earlier editions and translations of Diogenes of Oenoanda include the publication of the first discoveries in the nineteenth century (Heberdey and Kalinka, “Die philosophische Inschrift von Oinoanda”), as well as Chilton, *Diogenes of Oenoanda*, and Casanova, *I frammenti di Diogene d’Enoanda*. Extensive restorations printed in some editions not infrequently generate “bracket blindness,” which Tsouna describes as: “The tendency to overlook the brackets surrounding editorial restorations of a word or passage and thus develop interpretations based on slim or even non-existent evidence.”<sup>56</sup>

Recovering the fragments and reconstructing their original positions is like working on a “massive jigsaw puzzle,” a task that is aided by the fact that they can be sorted according to letter-size and column length.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the often recognizable version of the Epicurean *Key Doctrines* that runs in a frieze across the middle of the inscription can sometimes be used to line up contiguous or nearly contiguous stones. Nonetheless, the printed text cannot reproduce the layout of the inscription or capture its full impact as experienced by readers in antiquity. The different numeration systems can also cause confusion. Even the fragments that Smith first published in journals under New Fragment (NF) numbers were re-numbered for Smith’s book-length editions, both of which include helpful concordances. The practice since 1968 of giving to each new or rediscovered stone a “philosophical inscription” inventory number (identified in Turkish as *yazı felsefi*; abbreviated as YF in the publications) adds clarity, as some of the numbered “fragments” of the inscription in editions such as Smith’s actually consist of more than one stone.

There is good reason to believe that new work in Oenoanda will lead to dramatic expansions of the known texts, to the discovery of entirely new content, to more information about Diogenes, and to a better understanding of the approach to Epicureanism taken by Diogenes and his community. Meanwhile, virtual reconstruction has begun, assisted by the use of the global positioning system (GPS), terrestrial scanning, and other technologies.<sup>58</sup> Such reconstruction should also reveal more about the urban context and visual impact of this uniquely monumental invitation to Epicureanism.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, "Excavations at Oinoanda 1997," 125; and *Diogenes of Oinoanda*, 92–93.

<sup>2</sup> Clay, "A Lost Epicurean Community"; Smith, *Diogenes of Oinoanda*, 35–48; Hall, "Who Was Diogenes of Oenoanda?"

<sup>3</sup> Clay interprets the surviving four letters of a name (Ἀβελ[ , fr. 70) as a possible reference to L. Hedi Rufus Lollius Avitus, consul of 144 CE (Clay, "A Lost Epicurean Community"). In *Alexander the False Prophet*, Lucian adopts the persona of an outraged Epicurean who exposes frauds committed by an entrepreneurial oracle-monger. Smith, *Supplement to Diogenes of Oinoanda*, 113 suggests that the name is indeed a Greek form of Avitus, but takes this person to be an otherwise unknown acquaintance of Diogenes.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *Diogenes of Oinoanda*, 40–43; and Wörle, *Stadt und Fest im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien*, 19–43. Clay, *Paradosis and Survival*, 254 has also examined the various letter forms of the fragments and is not convinced by Smith's argument.

<sup>5</sup> All fragment numbers (fr.) and New Fragment numbers (NF) refer to Smith's editions.

<sup>6</sup> The genre of the philosopher's will may belong in this list. On Diogenes's imitation of Epicurus, see Clay, "New Discoveries," 2526–32.

<sup>7</sup> Imitation of Epicurus plays a role here. Clay, "New Discoveries," 2529 notes that it is remarkable that Epicurus and the first Epicureans "made the life and death of an individual bear the weight of so much philosophy."

<sup>8</sup> Smith, *Diogenes of Oinoanda*, 92. For reconstructions of the original layout, see Clay, "New Discoveries," 2477 and Smith, *Diogenes of Oinoanda*, fig. 6 (both reprinted in Erler, "Epicureanism in the Roman Empire," 55–56).

<sup>9</sup> Like Epicurus, Diogenes refers to atomic compounds as *συνκρίσεις* (fr. 13), and Plutarch may be correct to claim that Epicurus wrote that his mother had the sort of atoms that would produce a sage (*Non posse* 1100 a–b). See Clay, "New Discoveries," 2458.

<sup>10</sup> The Epicurean *tetrapharmakos* was an abbreviated version of the first four *Key Doctrines*: "The gods do not concern us; death is nothing to us; what is good can be easily obtained; what is bad can be avoided" (*P.Herc.* 1005.5.9–13; Angeli, "La scuola epicurea di Lampsaco").

<sup>11</sup> For an overview of the intense interest in the Greek past during what is often called the Second Sophistic, and on the enthusiasm for public performance, see Anderson, *The Second Sophistic*; and Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic*. See Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, 327–28 on the way Epicureanism is presented as Hellenic *paideia* in Lucian's *Alexander the False Prophet*.

<sup>12</sup> Bowie, "Greeks and Their Past," 205.

<sup>13</sup> Warren, "Diogenes Epikourios"; Snyder, *Teachers and Texts in the Ancient World*, 62.

<sup>14</sup> Wörrle, *Stadt und Fest im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien*.

<sup>15</sup> The word *φιλάνθρωπος* and its cognates are frequent in inscriptions that mention benefactions, including the Demostheneia inscription.

<sup>16</sup> Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman Empire* stresses the latter.

<sup>17</sup> All of these issues are treated in close proximity in frs. 2 and 3.

<sup>18</sup> In the Opramoas inscription, *πολιτεύεσθαι* ("to engage in public affairs" or "to be politically active") and its cognates appear at least fourteen times (see index in Kokkinia, *Die Opramoas-Inschrift von Rhodiapolis*). On the bath in Oenoanda, see Coulton, "The Buildings of Oinoanda."

<sup>19</sup> Warren, "Diogenes Epikourios," 148.

<sup>20</sup> Clay, *Paradosis and Survival*, 250–51.

<sup>21</sup> Although the command "live unknown" (*λάθῃ βιώσας*) is not attested in Epicurean texts, Plutarch associated it with Epicurus. See Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*. Cicero is apparently quoting an Epicurean motto when he writes that Atticus tells him, "Do not take part in politics" (*μὴ πολιτεύεσθαι*, Cic. *Att.* 14.20.5). DL 10.119 confirms that this was Epicurus's position.

<sup>22</sup> Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 129 and 143.

<sup>23</sup> Hammerstaedt and Smith remind readers that Smith's restorations are merely suggestions. For example, regarding Smith's restoration of NF 156, they write: "Of course he does not claim to show how the text went, only how it might have gone" (*Epicurean Inscription*, 59).

<sup>24</sup> Hammerstaedt and Smith, *Epicurean Inscription*, 131. Clay, "New Discoveries," 2543 suggests that Diogenes includes a letter to Hermarchus.

<sup>25</sup> On Lucretius as a fundamentalist, see Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*.

<sup>26</sup> Arrighetti, *Epicuro: Opere*, 126.

<sup>27</sup> Bendlin, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of Divination," 184.

<sup>28</sup> The "Dead Sea" may be a part of the northern ocean, rather than the lake in Palestine.

<sup>29</sup> Clay, "New Discoveries," 2535.

- <sup>30</sup> Snyder, *Teachers and Texts in the Ancient World*, 53.
- <sup>31</sup> Clay, "New Discoveries," 2535–36.
- <sup>32</sup> Ferguson, "Epicureanism under the Roman Empire," 2292.
- <sup>33</sup> He is apparently referring to Antiphon the sophist (fifth century BCE).
- <sup>34</sup> Bendlin, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of Divination," 181. See also Gordon, *Epicurus in Lycia*.
- <sup>35</sup> Epicurus affirms that "the gods do exist" (*Ep. Men.* 123–24).
- <sup>36</sup> Clay, "Diogenes and His Gods," 91–92.
- <sup>37</sup> Lucian's account has fictional elements, but there is extensive evidence for the immense popularity of the oracle invented by Alexander of Abonoteichus (c. 105–70 CE). See Robert, *À travers l'Asie Mineure*, 393–421.
- <sup>38</sup> Bendlin, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of Divination," 220–21; cf. Parke, *The Oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor*; and Robert, *À travers l'Asie Mineure*, 393–421.
- <sup>39</sup> Milner, "Notes and Inscriptions on the Cult of Apollo at Oinoanda."
- <sup>40</sup> Clay, "New Discoveries," 2507.
- <sup>41</sup> Arrighetti includes these fragments in his edition of Epicurus. See also Clay, "New Discoveries"; and Smith, *Diogenes of Oinoanda*, with bibliography.
- <sup>42</sup> Gordon, *Epicurus in Lycia*, 66–93; and Fletcher, "Epicurus' Mistresses."
- <sup>43</sup> Diogenes Laertius mentions a hostile story that Epicurus and his mother used to visit cottages to read charms (10.4).
- <sup>44</sup> Hoffman, *Diogenes of Oenoanda*, 442.
- <sup>45</sup> Düring, *Chion of Heraclea*.
- <sup>46</sup> Gordon, *Epicurus in Lycia*, 73–78.
- <sup>47</sup> Clay, "New Discoveries," 2519. There are now fifty-seven fragments of *Old Age*, some of which reveal only a few letters.
- <sup>48</sup> See Smith, "Excavations at Oinoanda 1997," 140–42, where Greek aversion to circumcision is also considered.
- <sup>49</sup> Smith, "Excavations at Oinoanda 1997," 142.
- <sup>50</sup> Gruen, *Diaspora*, 30–33 and 52–53.
- <sup>51</sup> Gordon and Reynolds, "Roman Inscriptions 1995–2000," 289.
- <sup>52</sup> Hammerstaedt and Smith, *Epicurean Inscription*, 90.
- <sup>53</sup> Hammerstaedt and Smith, *Epicurean Inscription*, 90. Hammerstaedt speculates that Diogenes's stance may be closer to that of Epicurus.
- <sup>54</sup> Hammerstaedt and Smith, *Epicurean Inscription*, 194.
- <sup>55</sup> Hammerstaedt and Smith, *Epicurean Inscription*, 2.
- <sup>56</sup> Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus*, 4 in reference to the texts of Philodemus. Tsouna attributes the term to David Sedley.
- <sup>57</sup> Hammerstaedt and Smith, *Epicurean Inscription*, 2.
- <sup>58</sup> Hammerstaedt and Smith, *Epicurean Inscription*, 2–3.

## CHAPTER 22

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# EPICURUS AND EPICUREANISM IN RABBINIC LITERATURE, MAIMONIDES, AND RABBI NACHMAN OF BRESLOV

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GABRIEL DANZIG

THE term Epicurus,<sup>1</sup> or Apiqoros as it is more often pronounced,<sup>2</sup> is alive and well in contemporary Jewish culture. When used by members of the Orthodox Jewish community, it means simply a heretic—a Jew who rejects the fundamental beliefs of the Jewish religion. But not every non-religious Jew merits the title of Apiqoros. Some are merely ignoramuses (*ammei ha'aretsot* or more sympathetically *tinot she-nishbu*). Those who adopt another religion, including those who do so for purely pragmatic or social reasons (e.g. Heinrich Heine), are defectors (*meshumadim*). An Apiqoros, on the other hand, is someone who rejects the Jewish religion for ideological or philosophic reasons. For this reason, he is more dangerous and arouses more anger than a mere *am ha'aretsot*; but by the same token an Apiqoros may wear his badge with pride.

Some anecdotes may illustrate the positive connotation the term *Apiqoros* can have among non-religious Jews. One was told to me by my father. When he studied architecture at Columbia University he was asked to record his religious affiliation on the registration form. Since he was not a religious Jew, and since he was always a bit of a prankster, he wrote that he was an *Apiqoros*. A few weeks later he received an invitation to services at the Greek Orthodox church. This anecdote illustrates not only the positive connotation that the term can have for a secular Jew, but also the special place that it occupies in Jewish culture: the non-Jewish registrar at Columbia could not make heads or tails of it.

A more famous anecdote is told about Berel Katsnelson, the well-known labor leader from the early days of Israel. He is quoted as having complained about the new generation of Israelis:

We wanted to raise a generation of *Apiqorsim*, but all we got is a generation of simpletons and ignoramuses.<sup>3</sup>

Here, an *Apiqoros* is not merely someone who rejects the Jewish religion for ideological or philosophic reasons; it is someone who does so after having immersed himself deeply in the sea of Torah study. It is a knowledgeable Jew, one who might have become a learned scholar (*talmid ḥacham*), but who has gone wrong—or right, depending on one's point of view. Baruch Spinoza is probably our most famous *Apiqoros* in this sense.

This positive view of the *Apiqoros* arose within the world of traditional Orthodox Judaism itself, as the following anecdote illustrates. A brilliant young student approaches the head of a rabbinic academy and defiantly exclaims, "I must tell you the truth! I have become an *Apiqoros*. I no longer believe in God." "And how long," asks the elder rabbi, "have you been studying Talmud?" "Five years," says the student. "Only five years," sighed the rabbi, "and you already call yourself an *Apiqoros*?! ..." Here indulgence in heretical thought is not merely the privilege of the learned, it is a sign of advanced learning.<sup>4</sup>

Why is heresy permitted to some and forbidden to others? Is freedom of thought simply a privilege of the elite, or did the head of the academy understand that entertaining such thoughts at an early stage in one's training might interfere with the educational process and lead to the results that Berel Katsnelson mourned? If so, the mistake is not entertaining heretical

opinions, but rather expecting students to devote themselves to Jewish learning after entertaining them.

A fourth anecdote is pertinent here. It is said that the Minsker Apiqoros once met the Pinsker Apiqoros. “I challenge you to a debate,” said the Minsker. “What makes you think you are a real Apiqoros?” “Well, I’m not sure I believe in God,” said the Pinsker. “I’m not sure I believe in God either,” replied the Minsker. “And I eat pork, I work on the Sabbath, and I never go to shul.” “You aren’t an Apiqoros,” said the Pinsker. “You’re a gentile.”

This joke again reflects the high status that an Apiqoros can hold, at least when one is joking or pretending to be joking: it is a huge let-down to be called a gentile rather than an Apiqoros. By referring to the Apiqorsim by their city of sway, in imitation of the practice of referring to Rabbis in this way, the joke presents them as caricatures of Rabbinic figures. In another version of the joke the leading figure is called the great Apiqoros of Vilna, reminiscent of the famous Vilna Gaon, and he is found praying and studying like a pious Jew.<sup>5</sup> These anecdotes make it clear that one can be an observant Jew and still be an Apiqoros—or rather one *must* be an observant Jew in order to be an Apiqoros. If one ceases to be an observant Jew one is not an Apiqoros at all, but merely a member of the gentile nations. This message was particularly relevant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when secular learning was invading Jewish culture and causing the abandonment of the practices of Judaism. Here, then, is another piece of advice for Katsnelson: one may entertain heretical thoughts, but one can only raise a generation of Apiqorsim if one insists on Jewish observance.

In this chapter I will not be able to trace all the paths by which the term developed these contemporary or near-contemporary usages. Instead, I will attempt to describe some of the more interesting moments of its history in the *Mishnah* and *Tosefta*, the Babylonian and Jerusalem *Talmuds*, Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah* (MT) and *Guide of the Perplexed*, and Rav Nachman of Breslov’s *Likutei Moharan*.

## RABBINIC LITERATURE

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Epicurus is a unique figure in Judaism—a Greek philosopher whose name has become a legal category. An Apikoros cannot give testimony in court (*MT*, Laws of Testimony 11.11); one may not return lost objects to Apiqorsim (*MT*, Laws of Robbery and Lost Objects 11.3); one is even obligated to kill them (*MT*, Laws of Murder and the Preservation of Life 4.14). But who exactly is an Apikoros?

Even the derivation of the term is not simple. It probably derives ultimately from the name of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, but Rabbinic literature displays no knowledge of the existence of a Greek philosopher by that name. If it were a semitic term, it would be derived from the root *pqr*, which by an apparently fortuitous coincidence means licentious, dissolute, or rebellious. This derivation has been maintained by at least one eminent philologist.<sup>6</sup> In general, the term is used in Tannaitic literature to refer to a category or kind of person.<sup>7</sup> But we do not know exactly what kind of person is meant. Since the term can refer to Jews or non-Jews (see *Sanhedrin* 38b), it seems to indicate an adherent of some belief or a member of some voluntary community, distinct from the Jewish community. Does it refer to a member of the Epicurean community? To members who espouse its doctrines? To anyone who espouses doctrines associated with that school? To anyone who behaves in ways that are characteristic of members of such communities, even if they are not members? Or has it lost all connection with the Epicurean school?

According to a common view, the early Tannaitic sources (first century before Hillel)<sup>8</sup> used the term Apikoros to refer to one who espouses Epicurean philosophy. The term appears in the *Mishnah* in a list of heretical opinions (*Sanhedrin* 10.1), and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh advises studying material that will enable one to respond to challenges posed by Apiqorsim (*Avot* 2.14). On the surface, both of these references suggest a Rabbinic awareness that an Apikoros espouses definite philosophic doctrines that are at variance with the Torah—even if we hear nothing about what those doctrines are. The later sources, on the other hand, reveal no awareness that an Apikoros might espouse specific philosophic doctrines, and interpret the earlier sources as speaking not of a band of philosophers but of individuals who display disrespect for the Torah. This divergence is explained on the grounds that while Epicurean sects existed in the land of Israel through the first century after Hillel, and had some contact with Rabbinic culture, they had ceased to exist by the time of the later authorities, who therefore knew

little about them. While the Tannaim knew of the Epicureans as philosophers, the later Amoraim barely knew what the term meant.<sup>9</sup>

However, the evidence we have also supports an alternative account almost the reverse of this first one. There is no clear evidence that the early Tannaitic sources were aware that the Apikoros espouses specific philosophic doctrines, and there is evidence that the later Amoraim had contact with Epicurean sects in the land of Israel as late as the third or fourth century. The Amoraic understanding of the term Apikoros as referring to those who behave in a disrespectful way may reflect an accurate perception of the contemporary Epicurean. Historically speaking, Epicureans did more than espouse a system of beliefs, they also lived together in communities such as the Garden established by Epicurus. Epicurean philosophy aimed at encouraging certain kinds of attitudes and behaviors, not merely at propagating right beliefs, and it was sometimes said that Epicureans neglected serious study altogether. The fact that individuals of all levels of intellectual accomplishment were accepted as members of Epicurean communities serves as a further warning against the assumption that Epicureanism was primarily an intellectual matter. It would not be surprising, then, if the term Epicurean or Apikoros referred to characteristic behaviors associated with these groups and not to the espousal of beliefs associated with them. This is exactly how Rabbinic literature uses the term.

## TANNAIM

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Our evidence about the meaning of the term Apikoros is extremely ambiguous. The term Apikoros appears four times in the earliest relevant Jewish sources. In the *Mishnah*, we find the following (*Sanhedrin* 10.1):

And these are they who have no place in the world to come: He who says there is no resurrection of the dead, that there is no Torah from Heaven, and an Apikoros.<sup>10</sup>

While the placement of the term Apikoros in a list of doctrinal heresies suggests that it refers to someone who denies some unnamed doctrinal principle, the content of the principle remains obscure. One might argue that the order of the statements suggests progressively more serious

heresies: he who denies the divinity of the Torah has rejected a more fundamental principle than he who denies the resurrection of the dead. If this progression continues, we would expect that the unnamed heresy is the denial of the existence or providence of God, the latter of which, at least, was in fact characteristic of Epicurean philosophy.<sup>11</sup>

But one may wonder why the *Mishnah* changes its pattern of speech by using a label (Apiqoros) rather than a description (he who denies God's existence or providence). Possibly the author of the *Mishnah* used the label because the heresy in question is so serious that he thought it would be improper to even speak of it openly in the *Mishnah*. It is also possible that the term Apiqoros was simply a widespread and convenient shorthand for some such heresy and was used for that reason. But the fact that the *Mishnah* uses a label rather than a description may also suggest that this third element differs in kind from the previous two. The term Apiqoros may be used because the *Mishnah* is referring to a certain kind of person, not a person with some unspecified belief.

This interpretation gains strength from the continuation of the *Mishnah* (*Sanhedrin* 10.1):

Rabbi Akiva says: Also he that reads the external books, or that utters charms over a wound and says "I will give you none of the diseases that I gave the Egyptians; for I am the Lord your healer." Abba Shaul says: also he who pronounces the Name with its proper letters.

Rabbi Akiva and Abba Shaul expand the list of those denied a place in the world to come by including unacceptable behaviors in addition to heretical beliefs. They may have felt that these items belong here because they understood the term Apiqoros in the previous statement not simply as a person with the wrong beliefs, but as a person who behaves wrongly.<sup>12</sup>

The Apiqoros is placed in a similar context in the *Tosefta* (*Sanhedrin* 13.5):

But the *minim*, and the apostates, and the informers, and Apiqorsim,<sup>13</sup> and those who have denied the Torah, and those who separate from the ways of the community, and those who have denied the resurrection of the dead, and anyone who has sinned and caused the public to sin, such as Yerovoam and Ahav, and those who have brought fear into the land of the living, and who put their hands on the Temple—Gehinom is locked before them and they are tortured in it for all generations.

Here the *Apiqorsim* are found on a mixed list: some of its elements may be interpreted as ideological deviants, but most cannot be, and virtually all of them are those who cause damage to the Jewish community or separate themselves from it. Thus the contexts in which the term is found are at best ambiguous as to whether the term refers to a doctrinal heresy or an unacceptable behavioral or social quality.<sup>14</sup>

The next occurrence of the term in the *Mishnah* is also ambiguous. In most editions of the *Mishnah* it is printed as follows (*Avot* 2.14):

Rabbi Elazar says: Be diligent in studying Torah, and know what to respond to an *Apiqoros*, and know before whom you labor, and faithful is your taskmaster to pay the reward of your labor.

However, this is not the original form in which the *Mishnah* was produced. In earlier manuscripts the first two elements are combined into one, producing the usual tripartite statement:

Rabbi Elazar says: Be diligent in studying what to respond to an *Apiqoros*, and know before whom you labor and who is your taskmaster (*ba'al melachtecha*).<sup>15</sup>

The demand that one learn what to respond to an *Apiqoros* implies that the *Apiqoros* has challenging things to say, and this suggests some philosophic doctrines or arguments. Whereas S. Lieberman thought that the Tannaim knew nothing more than “current general phrases” and had a “general impression” of Epicureanism, J. Labendz, basing herself on the work of J. Goldin,<sup>16</sup> argues that the rabbis had clear ideas about these doctrines, and may even have engaged in debates with them: “What is clear from the *mishnah* is that Rabbi Elazar, and at the very least the colleagues among whom he made this statement, were familiar with Epicureans and a basic tenet of their philosophy: the lack of divine interest or intervention in this world.”<sup>17</sup> This knowledge is allegedly reflected in the fact that after speaking of the *Apiqoros*, Rabbi Elazar speaks of the existence of God and holds forth an implicit promise of reward.<sup>18</sup> Knowing that Epicureans denied providence, Rabbi Elazar reminds his students, after advising them to investigate Epicurean materials in order to refute them, that divine providence does exist. This is Labendz’s clearest evidence that the Tannaim knew what doctrines Epicureans espoused.

On this view, Rabbi Elazar recommends the study of materials—presumably Greek philosophic materials—which could be used to refute Epicurean philosophy. At the same time, recognizing the danger of such study, he warns the reader not to forget the fundamental theological beliefs of Judaism that Epicureans denied. Jewish interpreters such as Rabbeinu Yonah also understood the second two elements of the *Mishnah* as qualifying the first (*Commentary on Pirkei Avot*):

When you discuss matters with the Apikoros and respond to his words, be careful that he does not seduce you secretly and you believe his words and follow his opinion. Rather, know before whom you labor—before one who observes your inner thoughts.

So too Maimonides:

Even though you learn the opinions of the nations to know how to respond to an Apikoros, be careful that nothing of these opinions enters into your heart.<sup>19</sup>

Although neither of these interpreters connected Rabbi Elazar's affirmation of providence with the denial of it by Epicurean philosophers, both saw the second two elements of the *Mishnah* as serving to counterbalance the admonition to know what to respond to the Apikoros.<sup>20</sup>

Rabbi Shimon ben Zemach Duran, author of a commentary on *Pirkei Avot* entitled *Magen Avot*, took a further step. He was deeply involved in theological disputations with non-Jews, and he understood the *Mishnah* as offering permission to study the works of non-Jewish thinkers and philosophers together with a warning against believing their opinions.<sup>21</sup> This opinion, which is essentially identical with that of J. Labendz, is exposed to several objections. First of all, it does not seem like a very effective bit of advice. It is hard to see how the mere reminder that the Rabbis affirm divine providence would provide an effective bulwark against the temptations of philosophic scepticism for a student who has delved into Greek philosophy and found it compelling. It seems particularly inappropriate as a reminder to a student who, *ex hypothesi*, has been sent in search of a rigorous refutation of such scepticism. If he has failed to find a good refutation, how will the warning of Rabbi Elazar serve in its place? On the other hand, if he has studied Epicurean philosophy and its alternatives to the point where he knows how to refute an Apikoros, why would he need such a warning?

One may raise objections on philological grounds as well. All these interpretations assume that the last two statements of the *Mishnah* affirm the existence and providence of God (“know before whom you labor, and who is your taskmaster”) as a counter-balance to the permission given to investigate heretical opinions. A more nuanced reading of the *Mishnah* would note that the emphasis is not theological but practical. Rather than a reminder of orthodox theological doctrines, these statements provide reassurance concerning the *sheqidah* (diligence in study) that was demanded in the first part of the *Mishnah*. Although one might imagine that one is wasting one’s time by putting so much effort into studying materials which would only be of use in responding to a hypothetical Apikoros, one should recall that there is a faithful taskmaster involved.<sup>22</sup> Rather than responding to any perceived doctrines put forward by Epicureans, the second part of the *Mishnah* is responding to the concerns of students who may be reluctant to accept the challenge of engaging the Apikoros. Although this *Mishnah*, like many others, is permeated with a belief in God’s existence and providence, it does not seem to be responding to any particular doctrines espoused by Epicureans, and hence it provides no evidence of Rabbi Elazar’s awareness of them. I will return to this point below.<sup>23</sup>

There is another reason for doubting this line of interpretation. If answering an Apikoros means refuting an Epicurean philosopher, then by advising the reader to be diligent (*shaqed*) in learning how to respond to an Apikoros, Rabbi Elazar is advising students to devote themselves to the study of Epicurean philosophy. But it is difficult to believe that Rabbi Elazar advised such study, or that if he had, the redactor of the *Mishnah* would have mentioned it. This is not merely because such advice seems counter to the pietistic spirit of Rabbinic ideology, or because according to Rabbi Akivah those who read outside texts have no part in the world to come, but also because there is very little evidence that the study of Greek philosophic texts ever took place in Rabbinic circles.<sup>24</sup> Not only did no one else that we know of ever adopt Rabbi Elazar’s advice on this point, there is no evidence in the voluminous Rabbinic literature that he himself ever studied any Epicurean or Greek philosophy.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, there is no tangible reason for such advice to have been given in the first place. J. Labendz assumes that there were common debates on

philosophic subjects between Rabbinic figures and Epicurean missionaries that would have sparked Rabbi Elazar's comments.<sup>26</sup> But there is no evidence of such debates. Even if there were confrontations with Epicureans, it is hard to imagine that the Epicureans challenged Rabbinic figures on the issues of physics and metaphysics, since the Rabbis had no theories of physics and metaphysics to challenge. If no confrontations took place, or if they focused on non-philosophic subjects, it would make little sense for Rabbi Elazar to advise studying Epicurean philosophy in order to respond to them.

One may wonder, however, if he did not advise the study of Greek philosophy, what did Rabbi Elazar mean by advising his students to study diligently how to respond to an *Apiqoros*? The statement implies that challenges were posed by *Apiqorsim*, but what were they? While we do not have any Tannaitic material that would answer this question definitively, we do have a record in the Jerusalem Talmud of what later Rabbis thought an *Apiqoros* would have asked. In this text, which is discussed below, the *Apiqorsim* are presented not as asking questions about issues of physics or metaphysics dealt with by Greek philosophy, but as ridiculing the laws of the Torah. There is some philosophic or rhetorical acuity in the challenges that are attributed to the *Apiqorsim*, so it is reasonable to see them as having received some philosophic training or at least training in logic or rhetoric. But their questions concern the supposed irrationality of the laws of the Torah, not Greek philosophy.<sup>27</sup>

If Epicurean challenges focused on the interpretation of scripture and its laws, we can propose a more natural interpretation of Rabbi Elazar's injunction in the *Mishnah*. Rather than recommending the study of Greek philosophy in order to respond to the *Apiqoros*, Rabbi Elazar is recommending redoubled study of the Torah. In addition to studying the Torah in a spirit of serious learning, one must also spend time considering how to respond to the ludicrous challenges that might be put by an *Apiqoros*.

This suggestion is supported by a consideration of the language used by Rabbi Elazar. The words "be diligent" (*heve shaqed*) suggest a devotion to learning that is inappropriate to the study of foreign heretical works or to any work other than the Torah. Perhaps for this reason a later editor or editors altered the text of the *Mishnah* to read as follows:



Be diligent to study *Torah* and know what to respond to the Apiqoros.<sup>28</sup>

This editor may have been bothered by the thought that Rabbi Elazar could have recommended the diligent study of Greek philosophy. If our interpretation is correct, he did not alter the basic meaning of the *Mishnah* by his intervention. His fortuitous alteration serves merely to clarify the intention of Rabbi Elazar: by advising diligence in studying how to refute the Apiqoros, he was actually advising diligence in a form of Torah-study.<sup>29</sup>

This interpretation helps unite the three elements of the *Mishnah* into a single intelligible whole concerned with the study of Torah and its reward. Rather than asserting the existence and providence of God as an ineffective reminder to those whose foreign studies have raised serious philosophic doubts, Rabbi Elazar is reminding his students that they will have recompense for their efforts to pore over the texts of the Torah in order to find refutations for every ludicrous challenge that an Apiqoros might bring.<sup>30</sup>

The fourth occurrence of the term Apiqoros in Tannaitic literature is the only one in which it is used unambiguously, and here it refers not to holders of a particular doctrine but to those who disobey Jewish legal authorities (*Sifre Numbers* 112):

*Because he has spurned the word of the Lord. This is a Sadducee. And has broken his commandment. This is an Apiqoros. Another interpretation: Because he has spurned the word of the Lord. This is one who disparages the Torah. And has broken his commandment. This is one who breaks the covenant of the flesh.*

The aim here is not to define the Apiqoros, but to determine who Scripture is referring to in speaking of one who has spurned the word of the Lord or broken his commandment. The discussion is based on *Numbers* 15:30–31, a passage concerning the individual who acts in a high-handed manner, violating the laws of the Torah not by mistake, but deliberately. The fact that the Rabbis identify the one who breaks the law as an Apiqoros shows that it is behavior rather than doctrine that distinguishes him in their view. Moreover, the parallel to the Sadducee suggests that the Apiqoros is viewed as a member of some recognizable social grouping, and not simply as a disobedient or heterodox Jew.

In conclusion, we have found no evidence that Rabbi Elazar or any other Tannaitic sage was aware of the philosophic doctrines of the Epicureans,

and no good evidence that they thought of an Apiqoros as someone who espouses particular doctrines. Similarly, we found no good support for the opinion that Rabbi Elazar recommended the study of philosophic texts as a means of responding to Apiqorsim. Neither Rabbi Elazar nor any other Tannaitic sage seems to have been aware of anything more than the generally anti-religious and authority-mocking outlook of Epicureans. This does not mean that Epicureans of the Tannaitic period had no doctrines, or even that none of the Tannaim was aware of them, but they certainly were not interested enough to mention them in the voluminous Rabbinic literature.

## AMORAIM

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In both the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Talmuds, Amoraitic authorities describe Apiqorsim primarily in terms of the disrespect they showed to the Law and its expositors:

*The Apiqoros*: Rabbi Yoḥanan and Rabbi Lazar. One said, Like one who said “That scribe!” (or: book!). The other said, Like one who said “Those Rabbis!” (*Jerusalem Talmud*, *Sanhedrin* 10:1, 27d).

Our Rabbis taught, *For he has despised the word of the Lord, and broken his commandment, he shall be cut off*. This is the one who says there is no Torah from Heaven. Another interpretation. *For he has despised the word of the Lord*. This is an Apiqoros. Another interpretation. *For he has despised the word of the Lord*. This is one who shows contempt for Torah (*megaleh panim beTorah*) and has broken his commandment. This is the one who breaks the covenant of flesh (*Babylonian Talmud*, *Sanhedrin* 99a).

*Apiqoros*: Rav and Rabbi Ḥanina both say, This is one who insults a sage. Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi say, This is one who insults his fellow in the presence of a sage.

He who says an Apiqoros is one who humiliates his friend in front of a sage makes sense. [In his view] one who insults a sage himself is [called] a *megaleh panim beTorah shelo kehalacha*. But for one who says an Apiqoros is one who humiliates a sage himself, who [is called] a *megaleh panim beTorah*? One who is like Menasheh ben Ḥezkiah.

There are those who relate this discussion to the last phrase.

*megaleh panim beTorah*: Rav and Rabbi Ḥanina both say, This is one who insults a sage. Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi say, This is one who insults his fellow in the presence of a sage.

He who says a *megaleh panim beTorah* is one who insults a sage himself makes sense. [In his view] one who insults his fellow in the presence of a sage is [called] an Apiqoros. But for one who says a *megaleh panim beTorah* is one who insults his fellow in the presence of a sage, what sort of person is an Apiqoros?

[Answer:] Rav Yoseph said Like one who says, “How have the Rabbis benefited us? They read for their own benefit, they teach for their own benefit.”

Abbaye said to him, “This too is contempt for the Torah, as it is written, *If I have not made a covenant with day and night and have not set the laws of heaven and earth*” (Jeremiah 33:25).

Rav Nachman said, “From here also you can learn this, as is said, *And I will forgive the entire place for their sakes.*” Rather it is like one who sat before his teacher and had an opportunity to explain a teaching he learned in another place, and he said, “This is what we say there,” but he did not say, “This is what the master said.”

Rava said, Like those of the house of Benjamin the physician who say, “How have the rabbis benefited us? They have never permitted the raven or forbidden the dove.” ... Rav Papa said, Like one who said “Those Rabbis!”

Rav Papa slipped and said “Those Rabbis!” and he sat down and fasted. (*Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin*, 99b–100a)<sup>31</sup>

J. Labendz has argued that these passages show that the Amoraim do not know what the term *Apiqoros* means: hence the divergent efforts to define it.<sup>32</sup> But the Amoraim mentioned here do have a clear general sense of what the term means. They know that an *Apiqoros* is someone who treats the Torah, its scholars, or students with disrespect. They are neither wondering about the typical behavior of an *Apiqoros* nor trying to define an unknown quantity. Rather they are asking what kind of behavior is sufficient to place one in the legal category of an *Apiqoros*. This is not a lexicographical discussion, but a legal one. And despite the varying views on the legal issue, the fact that all the rabbis share a basic conception of the character of the *Apiqoros* as someone who treats the Torah and its scholars with contempt shows that this is a common and well-founded conception, not something based on far-fetched speculation.

The testimony of classical Greek and Latin authors reflects a similar conception of the Epicureans. The writings of Cicero and Plutarch are closer in time to the Tannaim than to the Amoraim, but like the Amoraim they emphasize the fact that Epicurus himself treated other intellectual leaders, including his own teachers, with bitter contempt:

He [Epicurus] says that he was a student of one Pamphilus, a disciple of Plato ... yet Epicurus treats this Platonic philosopher with extraordinary contempt, so fearful was he that it should be thought he ever had any instruction. But he is caught in the case of Nausiphanes, the follower of Democritus; and since he could not deny having been his pupil, he assailed him with every kind of abuse (Cic. *ND* 1.72–73).

Relying on these dreams, not only did Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Hermarchus speak against Pythagoras, Plato, and Empedocles, but even that little harlot, Leontium, dared to write against Theophrastus ... So much license was there in the garden of Epicurus...

Epicurus attacked Aristotle with great abuse. He foully slandered Phaedo, the disciple of Socrates. He attacked Timocrates, the brother of his companion Metrodorus, with whole volumes, because he disagreed with him in some trifling point of philosophy. He was ungrateful even to Democritus, whose follower he was; and his master Nausiphanes, from whom he learned something, received similar bad treatment.

Zeno gave abuse not only to those who were then living, as Apollodorus, Syllus, and the rest, but he called Socrates, who was the father of philosophy, the Attic buffoon, using the Latin word *Scurra*... . And you yourself a little before, when you were counting the philosophers like members of the senate, said that the most eminent men talked like foolish, delirious idiots (Cic. *ND* 1.93–94).

If there is any substance at all to Cicero's accusations,<sup>33</sup> Epicurus promoted hostile attitudes towards rival intellectual leaders, and in the Jewish context, that would include Rabbinic figures.

Moreover, Epicurus and his followers exhibited a strong contempt for political leaders, especially those who were reputed to have founded political communities or provided divinely inspired laws. In his *Against Colotes*, Plutarch describes in detail the unfair treatment that Colotes, pupil of Epicurus, accorded to a whole range of non-Epicurean philosophers, and then goes on to criticize the Epicureans for their unfavorable attitudes toward political and legal authorities:

No praise can ever do justice to the men who dealt with these brutish feelings by establishing constitutions, governments, and a system of legislation. But who are the men that destroy and dissolve these things, and utterly abolish them? Is it not those who withdraw themselves and their companions from the state? Is it not those who say that the crown of an untroubled spirit is beyond comparison to success in a great command? Is it not those who say that to be a king is a fault and a failure? (Plut. *Against Colotes* 31).

These men, if they write about such matters at all, write on government to deter us from participating in it, and about rhetoric to deter us from public speaking, and about kingship to make us shun the company of kings. *They mention statesmen only to deride them and belittle their fame*, for instance Epameinondas, who they say had but one good thing about him, and even that "smallish" (Plut. *Against Colotes* 33; 1125c).

... That they made war, moreover, not [merely] with lawgivers but with laws we may learn from Epicurus who asks himself in *Disputed Questions* whether the sage will do certain things that the laws forbid, if he knows he will escape notice. He answers, "an unqualified accusation is not propitious"—that is, "I shall do it, but I do not wish to admit it." Again—in a letter to Idomeneus, I believe—he calls upon him "not to live in servitude to laws and opinions, as long as they don't make trouble through blows from neighbors." If, then, those who abolish laws and governments also abolish humane life, and if Epicurus and Metrodorus do just this when they dissuade their companions from public service and quarrel with those engaged in it, and again *when they speak badly of the earliest and wisest lawgivers and recommend contempt for law* if there is no fear of a blow or punishment, I know of no false charge directed by Colotes against the others so grave as his true

accusation against the words and teachings of Epicurus (Plut. *Against Colotes* 34; 1127a–e; italics mine).

The attitudes described here are what were found in the educated circles of Greek and Roman Epicureans. There is no reason to think that the Epicureans of Judea would have behaved any better. Indeed, the evidence of the Amoraim strongly suggests that the Epicureans of Judea exhibited the exact same kind of hostility to outside intellectual authorities and lawgivers that is described in these Greek and Latin texts.

The simplest explanation for the accuracy of the Amoraitic description of Epicureans is that they had direct contact with them, and hence that Epicurean circles continued to exist in the land of Israel after the Tannaitic period.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the Amoraitic material provides a fuller and more accurate picture of Epicureans, at least as far as their social character is concerned, than what we have in the Tannaitic material. The Amoraim describe the Epicureans as disrespectful to Rabbinic authority, not merely disobedient to it, which seems more consonant with the classical material.<sup>35</sup> Their discussion is fuller in that, as we will see, it also includes references to the egalitarian social principles that characterized Epicurean society. But the fact that Cicero's and Plutarch's Epicureans were contemporaries of the Tannaim suggests that these qualities would also have characterized Epicureans of Judea in the time of the Tannaim. This reinforces our contention that Rabbi Elazar was referring to Apiqorsim as members of a disobedient and disrespectful group rather than as members of a serious school of philosophy.<sup>36</sup>

## API-KORACH

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The Amoraim have a tendency to discover Apiqorsic qualities in biblical figures. R' Yirmeyah ben Elazar<sup>37</sup> declares that the snake in the Garden of Eden was an Apiqoros (*Genesis Rabbah* 19). Another passage declares that Korach was an Apiqorsi (JT *Sanhedrin* 50a). The fact that these figures are identified as Apiqorsim is significant in itself. The snake was the instigator of a rebellion against God (*Genesis* 3), and Korach was the leader of a rebellion against Moses (*Numbers* 16). These references show that the

Amoraim had a clear conception of the Apikoros as someone who rejects religious authority.

Korach's Apiqorsic character is displayed in a Midrashic exchange with Moses described in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 50a).<sup>38</sup> Korach makes a garment of pure *techelet* (light blue wool) and asks Moses whether or not it requires ritual fringes of *techelet* as well. Moses replies that it does and quotes a passage to support his opinion. Korach next asks whether a house that is full of scrolls requires a *mezuzah* (a ritual scroll on the doorpost). And again, Moses replies in the affirmative quoting a relevant passage.

These questions show two aspects of the Apikoros. On the one hand, they are trivial questions designed to show that the Law is an ass. Why should one need to put fringes of *techelet*, which reflects the kingly or priestly status of the Jew, on a garment that is already made completely of *techelet*? Why should one need to put on the doorpost a tiny portion of a Torah scroll, which reminds one of the obligation to engage in study, when the whole house is full of Torah scrolls? These questions display the Apikoros as someone who ridicules the Torah and its scholars.

Korach's questions are not merely legalistic quibbles, they are also implicit challenges to the idea of a political hierarchy. In the biblical text, Korach begins his attack on Moses by proclaiming that, "All the community is holy, every one, and God is among them; why do you lord it over the community of God?" (*Numbers* 16:3). The Midrashic parable expands on this challenge made in the name of egalitarianism by means of analogies meant to represent the political community. Since *techelet* represents kingship or priesthood, the idea of a garment made completely of *techelet* suggests the possibility of a community all of whose members are kings. Such a community should not need a kingly leader like Moses, just as such a garment should not need an additional *techelet* fringe. The second question is similar. Since scrolls represent wisdom, a house that is full of scrolls represents a community all of whose members are wise. Such a community should not need a wise leader like Moses, just as such a house should not need a scroll on the doorpost. The Apikoros, then, is represented not merely as engaging in destructive quibbling, he is also arguing against the very idea of political authority.

Korach's last question is more far-reaching. He questions Moses about the laws of purity. What is the status of a person who has a small white spot on the skin? Moses replies that the individual is rendered impure.

Apparently knowing something of the law, Korach asks what would be the ruling if the white spot spread to the entire body. Moses responds that in such a case the body is pure. Paradoxically, the spread of a malignant symptom throughout the entire body produces purity. What makes the body impure is the differentiation of one small part from the rest. By implication, Moses's retention of a position of leadership serves to pollute the entire people. Thus once again Korach's question is designed to challenge the status of differentiation in the human community and to deny the legitimacy of political authority. But this time, Moses has to acknowledge the unfortunate results of differentiation even on the basis of the laws of the Torah themselves.<sup>39</sup>

As we have seen, the opposition to foreign intellectual and political authorities was a well-known trait of the Epicureans. But it also appears that the Epicureans observed an unusual degree of equality in their personal relations with each other. This is widely recognized by contemporary scholars, who base themselves primarily on the fact that both slaves and prostitutes were welcome in the Epicurean circle. As S. K. Stowers notes, Epicurean friendship was set apart from normal friendship by its apolitical and egalitarian characteristics.<sup>40</sup> P. L. Bowditch has commented on "The Epicurean indifference to distinction—whether of gender or political status—in its celebration of the horizontal relation of friendship ...".<sup>41</sup> The depiction of Korach as an Epicurean who undermines the legitimacy of hierarchy within the Jewish community fits well with this aspect of Epicurean society.

After obtaining Moses's answer to this last question, Korach responds with a grave declaration, "The Torah is not from heaven, Moses is not a prophet, and Aaron is not a high priest." This conclusion follows in two ways. On the one hand, the replies that Moses has made are so absurd that they show that the Torah he teaches is not from heaven. This in turn implies that he himself is not a prophet, and that Aaron, whom he appointed as high priest, is no high priest. On the other hand, if the interpretation that Moses offered in the case of impurity is correct, then it still follows that egalitarianism is to be preferred to authoritarianism, and hence that the system of authority that Moses has established, consisting of the Torah, the prophet, and the high priest, should be abolished.



Here for the first time, in Korach's declaration, we find an ideological position explicitly attributed to the Apikoros: he denies the divinity and hence the legitimacy of the Law and thereby seeks to undermine existing authority. Unlike the earlier Tannaitic sources, this Amoraic source does clearly attribute a doctrinal heresy to the Apikoros and draws out its anti-nomian implications.<sup>42</sup> However, this doctrinal heresy does not provide a good reflection of historical Epicurean philosophy (see the discussion of *Mishneh Torah* below).

Moses responds:

If a mouth was created for the earth in the six days of creation, it is well, and if not, may it be created at this moment. "And if the Lord should create a [new] creation ... ."

The request for the earth to use its mouth or be given one appears to be a request for Korach and his followers to be swallowed up alive, as indeed occurs in the biblical text (*Numbers* 16). However, the *midrash* has created a new context of debate in which the request for the earth to use its mouth may be seen as a request for it to respond on Moses's behalf to the challenges of Korach. The earth of course responds with a deed rather than an argument. The swallowing up of Korach and his followers may be intended to show that, all argument aside, anarchic societies cannot survive. Thus interpreted, the passage offers a prediction that the Apikorsim, while undefeated in argument, will be unable to survive historically.<sup>43</sup>

## MAIMONIDES AND THE APIQOROS

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Knowledge of Epicurean philosophy is first found in the flourishing of Jewish philosophic literature in the tenth to twelfth centuries within the Arabic-speaking Islamic world. Abraham ibn Ezra opined that the Epicureans viewed pleasure as the aim of human life (*Commentary on Deuteronomy* 21.18). Abraham ibn Daud called them philosophic deniers.<sup>44</sup> Yehudah Halevi described Epicurus as a Greek who believed that the world came into being by chance and that pleasure is the final end of human existence and the absolute good (sefer haKuzari 5.20; see also 5.8 in the Hebrew translations which retain this section lost in Arabic). In the *Guide of the Perplexed* Maimonides speaks of Epicurus as a Greek philosopher

who denied the existence of God, creation, prophecy, and providence, while affirming the existence of atoms (1.73, 2.13, 2.32, 3.17). We will discuss this below.

And yet, in his first major composition, the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Maimonides does not seem to know that Epicurus was a Greek philosopher. He mentions the Talmud's opinion that the Jewish Apikoros is worse than his non-Jewish counterpart, since he is more dissolute,<sup>45</sup> and adds, in seeming contradiction to the view of Rabbi Elazar, that one should *refrain* from disputing with Jewish Apiqorsim. He explains that there is no cure for a Jewish Apikoros, and quotes Jeremiah's dictum, "All those who enter her will not return." This quotation will be important for Rav Nachman's interpretation of the Apikoros. But he does not mention that Epicurus was a Greek philosopher, instead interpreting the term Apikoros in accordance with the Talmudic discussion as derived from the Hebrew root *pqr*.

It has been suggested that at the time of composing this youthful work Maimonides was not aware of the existence of a philosopher named Epicurus, and hence did not see the term Apikoros as related to him.<sup>46</sup> If true, this implies that the young Maimonides not only failed to read Arabic texts which mentioned Epicurus, such as the treatise by Alexander on providence, but also failed to read Jewish authors such as Abraham ibn Daud, Abraham ibn Ezra, and Yehudah Halevi. On the other hand, we cannot dismiss the possibility that Maimonides deliberately ignored the Greek origin of the term in his *Commentary* for didactic reasons, preferring to record the homiletic discussion found in the Talmud. After all, he was writing a commentary on Talmudic literature and may have preferred to record the view represented there. It is also worth bearing in mind that the Talmudic etymology of the term may itself be a self-consciously homiletic effort rather than a serious philological one.

The possibility that Maimonides is consciously ignoring the Greek philosopher draws some support from a consideration of his treatment of the subject in *Mishneh Torah* (MT). Here too Maimonides fails to mention the philosopher Epicurus or to draw a connection between him and the Apikoros of the Talmud; but signs that he was aware of the connection can be found. The *Mishneh Torah* offers Maimonides scope to include material that is not found in Talmudic literature, and in formulating his views on the Apikoros, Maimonides seems clearly to rely on extra-talmudic material

about Epicurus. In many places Maimonides uses the terms *Apiqoros* and *Min* more loosely,<sup>47</sup> but when he formally defines the *Apiqoros* in his list of heresies in the *Laws of Repentance* he treats him as someone who holds false theological beliefs (3.8). This is perplexing when one considers, as we have seen, that the Talmudic material on which Maimonides bases himself defines the *Apiqoros* as someone who treats the Torah, its teachers, and its students with disrespect. Only in the Aggadic passage on Korach—not the most likely place to look for deriving normative legal rulings—is there an implication of doctrinal heterodoxy in the *Apiqoros*. Based on this passage, however, we would have expected Maimonides to define the *Apiqoros* as someone who denies the validity of the Torah. Instead, however, he attributes this characteristic to another figure, the Denier of the Torah (3.8).<sup>48</sup>

Aside from the passage on Korach, the Talmud generally treats the *Apiqoros* as someone who treats the Torah and its scholars with disrespect. But Maimonides places such people in a different category (3.14), and defines the *Apiqoros* as someone who maintains false theological opinions. And yet, as the *Leḥem Mishneh* points out (commentary on *Laws of Repentance* 3.6), Maimonides's formulation on those who treat the Torah and its scholars with disrespect is clearly derived from the Talmudic discussion of the *Apiqoros*.<sup>49</sup> The Talmudic *Apiqoros* has been given a new name, and Maimonides's *Apiqoros* has been given a new crime. Why does Maimonides do this?

Maimonides's treatment of the *Apiqoros* seems to be based in part on his own theological principles and in part on the extra-Talmudic philosophic material he read. Maimonides attributes to the *Apiqoros* three distinct heresies: (1) denial of prophecy, (2) denial of the prophecy of Moses, and (3) denial that God is aware of human actions (3.8). These characteristics closely resemble Maimonides's discussion of Epicurus the philosopher in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. There he describes Epicurus as a philosopher who denied the existence of God, and consequently denied creation, prophecy, and providence. The two descriptions agree in the denial of prophecy, and also in the denial of providence, for God's awareness of human actions is a crucial component of divine providence. Since the description in the *Guide* is clearly based on extra-Talmudic philosophic

sources, it seems reasonable to assume that those same sources influenced Maimonides's discussion in the *MT*.

Still, the treatment in the *MT* does not correspond exactly to the treatment in the *Guide*. In the *Guide*, Maimonides not only claims that Epicurus denies the existence of prophecy and providence (as well as creation), he also claims that Epicurus denies the existence of God (see, e.g., 2.13).<sup>50</sup> In the *MT*, on the other hand, the *Apiqoros* does not deny the existence of God (or creation); it is the *Min* who denies the existence of God (and there is no figure who specifically denies creation). Thus the discussion in the *MT* corresponds exactly neither to the Talmudic material nor to the philosophic material reflected in the *Guide*. It seems to be derived instead from a combination of the two sources. *In the MT Maimonides attributes to the Apiqoros those heretical doctrines espoused by the philosopher Epicurus for which some basis can be found in the Talmudic material, even if this means stretching that material a little.*

As we have seen, in the Jerusalem Talmud, Korach says explicitly that Torah is not from Heaven and that Moses is not a prophet. This seems a likely source for Maimonides's definition of the *Apiqoros* as one who denies prophecy and the prophecy of Moses. But without the philosophic background, Maimonides would not have reached such a definition. Strictly speaking, Korach does not deny the validity of prophecy altogether, but only the prophecy of Moses. His arguments with Moses are all based on the texts of the Hebrew Bible, and his claim that the Torah is not from heaven seems to be aimed at denying the validity of Jewish law in particular. He denies that *Moses* is a prophet, not that prophecy is possible; and he denies that *Aaron* is a priest, but does not claim that the priesthood is illegitimate. On its own, this material could more easily be used to justify the claim that the *Apiqoros* is one who denies the validity of Jewish law—Maimonides's Denier of the Torah—rather than one who denies prophecy altogether. Why then did Maimonides conclude that it actually encompasses a denial of the very possibility of prophecy?

One might argue that the answer is to be found in the omission of the definite article in the Jerusalem Talmud. Rather than saying "The Torah is not from heaven," Korach says "Torah is not from heaven." Without the article, the word Torah does not necessarily refer to the Jewish Law; it may also have a more general meaning of teaching or guidance. So when Korach says Torah is not from heaven, Maimonides may have interpreted him to

mean that there is no teaching or guidance given to man by God, and hence that there is no prophecy at all. But while this is a possible interpretation of the Jerusalem Talmud, it is not the only or even the most natural interpretation. Korach's arguments only purport to show that the Jewish law is absurd, not that all prophecy is fraudulent, and the omission of the definite article is by no means a decisive consideration. Why then did Maimonides choose this interpretation?

There is an obvious relationship between Maimonides's list of heresies in the *Laws of Repentance* and his list of thirteen fundamental beliefs of Judaism which he formulated in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*.<sup>51</sup> These thirteen fundamental beliefs are not based on any Talmudic discussion, but are the result of Maimonides's own philosophical-theological speculation.<sup>52</sup> The first five heresies Maimonides lists here (those of the *Min*) are nothing other than the denial of the first five principles of faith, those relating to the existence and nature of God. In addition to these five principles, Maimonides upholds eight more principles, including principles that relate to prophecy and to divine providence. In order to categorize these false beliefs, Maimonides needs to appropriate numerous terms for heretics and to adapt Talmudic discussions to his own philosophic purposes. Since the Apikoros was treated in the Jerusalem Talmud as denying the prophecy of Moses, it is only a slight stretch to present him as one who denies prophecy altogether. In making this stretch, Maimonides would have been helped by the lack of the definite article in the Jerusalem Talmud.<sup>53</sup> But the motive for making the stretch in the first place is to be found in the knowledge, reflected in the *Guide*, that Epicurus denied the possibility of prophecy altogether.

This approach also helps explain the most difficult problem in Maimonides's discussion of the Apikoros. Why does he attribute to the Apikoros the belief that God is ignorant of the actions of human beings? There is nothing in the Talmudic literature which attributes such a belief to him. In the *Guide*, however, where Maimonides is relying on philosophic sources, he recognizes that Epicurus denied the existence of divine providence. Divine providence is connected with knowledge of the actions of human beings, and Maimonides makes an effort to demonstrate the possibility of such knowledge prior to his discussion of providence in the *Guide* (3.16). In Maimonides's view, then, Epicurus's denial of providence included a denial that God is aware of the actions of men. Again, the

philosophic sources that shaped Maimonides's discussion of Epicurus in the *Guide* seem to be responsible for shaping his discussion of the Apikoros in *MT* as well.

But why does Maimonides omit the denial of God's existence from the description of the Apikoros?<sup>54</sup> One could perhaps argue that his views changed between the composition of *MT* and the *Guide*: at the time of the composition of the *MT* he may not have believed that Epicurus denied the existence of gods (strictly speaking he didn't), while later in the *Guide* he may have concluded that he did. But it seems likely that here it is the Talmudic discussion which sets the limits. The Talmud offers another figure, the *Min*, to whom Maimonides prefers to attribute the denial of God's existence. And there is no hint of the denial of God's existence in the Talmudic discussion of the Apikoros, and hence nothing on which to base such a definition.<sup>55</sup> Here again, the definition of the Apikoros results from an effort to include anything attributed to the historical Epicurus which can be plausibly derived from the Talmudic discussion, even by a stretch. The fact that Maimonides does not mention Epicurus in *MT* does not show that he was unaware of him, and this conclusion may apply to the *Commentary* as well.

## THE PHYSICAL THEORIES OF EPICURUS IN MAIMONIDES'S *GUIDE*

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How much was actually known of Epicurean theories in Maimonides's time? Certainly the theory of atomism was widely known, even if it was not always attributed to Epicurus. Such theories lay at the heart of the physical doctrine of the Islamic theologians known as the Mutakallimūn, and were known to Jewish writers such as Sa'adia Gaon and the Karaite thinkers Joseph al-Basīr and Jeshua ben Judah. The possibility that these theories represent a continuation of Epicurean speculation within a religious context has been discussed, but no scholarly consensus has emerged.<sup>56</sup> A. Dhanani argues that Kalām atomism derives from late-antique Epicurean accounts of atomism. But while strong circumstantial evidence supports this account, it remains speculative because we have few records of late-antique Epicurean theory, and because Kalām writers did not acknowledge such debts. Islamic



writers rarely mentioned Epicurus at all, even though they must have known about him from whatever sources brought him to the attention of Arabic-reading Jews.<sup>57</sup> Given the general silence on Epicurus in the Islamic world, the failure to attribute atomism to Epicurus does not show either that he was not its source or even that Islamic writers were unaware of that.<sup>58</sup>

But while Kalām thinkers did not draw the connection, two comments by Maimonides show that he at least did consider Kalām atomism to be a continuation of Epicureanism. In commenting on their theories he says (1.73):

These atoms, they believe, are not, as was supposed by Epicurus and other atomists, limited in existence, but they say that God creates them always: their non-existence is also possible.

By distinguishing Kalām atomism from Epicurean atomism in this one respect, Maimonides implies that in other ways their theories closely resemble each other. In fact, Maimonides says explicitly that the Kalām theologians adopted their theories, especially the existence of atoms and a void, from “the earlier philosophers”—a clear reference to Epicurus (1.71, 1.78).

The exact significance of the distinction Maimonides draws between Kalām and Epicurean atomism is not clear. Basing themselves on the Arabic text, most scholars think that he is saying that for the Kalām the number of atoms is unlimited; but according to ibn Tibbon’s Hebrew translation Maimonides says that the Kalām atoms are not eternal. These views may well amount to the same thing: unlike Epicurean atoms, which are eternal but not unlimited in number, the Kalām atoms are both unlimited in number and limited in duration. This divergence is connected to the theological orientation of the Kalām, and in particular to their affirmation of creation in time by God. Since Epicurus believed that the world is eternal he was able to postulate that the atoms too are eternal and indestructible and that a limited number of atoms is sufficient to ensure the continuation of the universe for an infinite time in the future. But with a belief in the temporal origin of the universe, the atoms have a beginning in time and therefore should have an end in time. In order for the world to continue indefinitely into the future, the Kalām would have to postulate that God can create new atoms at all times. This would make them potentially unlimited in number. Indeed, according to the Kalām, God creates the accidents and the atoms at



every instant (see *Guide* 1.73, sixth premise and 1.74, fourth method). In this way the Kalām theologians altered a principle of Epicurean atomism to fit the theory of creation and forged a new theory in which God creates a world that functions (otherwise) on the principles of Epicurean physics.<sup>59</sup>

While sharing with the Kalām the aim of defending creation in time, and with it the possibility of miracles, Maimonides had little sympathy with atomic physics. He accepted the Aristotelian physics, which he describes in detail in *Guide* 1.72, emphasizing several times that “there is no vacuum whatever ... but the whole space is filled up with matter.” The emphatic character of this statement suggests a polemic aim of denying the speculations of those who posited a vacuum.<sup>60</sup> Maimonides devoted significant effort (1.71, 1.73–1.76) to describing and refuting the Kalām account of physics. Since he viewed the Kalām as derived in part from Epicureanism, his description and critique of the Kalām deserves to be treated in any discussion of the medieval reception of Epicureanism. Here I can only offer a brief summary.

The Kalām theologians adopted their theories from Greeks and Syrians who wished to disagree with the opinions of the (Aristotelian) philosophers in order to support Christianity, which had gained political dominance (1.71, 177). They felt free to pick and choose among theories that had been disproved, including atomism (1.71, 178). Their aim was to support religious law by affirming temporal creation and the possibility of miracles. They gave a great role to divine will by positing the continuous creation of atoms and denying ordinary causation. However, they “did not base their arguments on the appearance of that which exists, but considered how being ought to be in order that it furnish a proof for a particular opinion” (1.71, 178). Thus they denied the existence of nature, considering that what exists is merely customary and could be different (1.71, 179). Similarly, they did not distinguish between the imagination and the intellect (1.71, 179, 1.73, premise 10), and rejected the evidence of the senses (1.73, premise 12).<sup>61</sup> Sometimes the Kalām thinkers were forced into absurdities. For example, in order to defend their theory that time and space are made up of units, the Kalām theologians were forced to posit that rotating objects are disassembled while rotating (1.73, third premise, 197–98).

In addition to mentioning Epicurus in connection with Kalām atomism, Maimonides mentions him on three other occasions. In chapter 2.13,

Maimonides offers three theories of creation: the theory of the Torah, a Platonic theory, and an Aristotelian theory. He says that it is useless to mention the theory of Epicurus and his followers, since they have no knowledge of the existence of the deity, and God's existence has been demonstrated.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, he does tell us that they believe that things come into existence by chance and that there is no one who governs the world.<sup>63</sup> In chapter 2.32, Maimonides mentions three theories of prophecy: a foolish popular theory, an Aristotelian theory, and the theory of the Torah. He also mentions Epicurus, commenting again that there is no need to mention him: since he did not believe in the deity, he certainly did not believe in prophecy. In chapter 3.17, Maimonides discusses five theories of providence. Here Maimonides does not say that it is useless to mention Epicurus, but rather includes him in his list of five opinions, which includes two Kalām theories but omits Plato.

Scholars have wondered why the presentation of opinions on providence diverges in these ways. One explanation is that Maimonides wishes to draw a parallel to the Book of Job, where he identifies five opinions on providence.<sup>64</sup> But one doubts that he would have used the Book of Job and found five theories in it if he did not already believe that they are five in number. Another path would be to examine the way Maimonides speaks about these different doctrines. Whereas the Epicurean opinions on creation and prophecy are said to be disproved because the existence of the deity has been demonstrated, this is not said of the Epicurean opinion on providence. The Epicurean theory of providence may be worth mentioning because, unlike the other Epicurean doctrines, its refutation is not implied by the demonstration of the existence of the deity. The Epicurean denial of providence could be consistent with theism since it is not so much a denial of a theological principle as it is a denial of a principle of natural science, the principle of an orderly universe. The mere existence of God is not sufficient to demonstrate the orderliness of the universe, since some theologians posited a world run by divine will rather than natural necessity. In order to refute the Epicurean denial of providence, therefore, the demonstration of the existence of God is not sufficient. One must also demonstrate that the world is governed by natural laws and not by chance, and this is what Maimonides attempts to do.

According to Maimonides, Epicurus argued that (464):

There is no providence at all with regard to anything whatsoever in all that exists; that everything in it, the heavens and the things other than they, has happened by chance and in accordance with the way things were predisposed; and that there is no one who orders, governs, or is concerned with anything. This is the opinion of Epicurus. He also professes that there are atoms, and holds that they mingle according to chance and that what is generated out of them is generated by chance. Those in Israel who were unbelievers also professed this opinion; they are those of whom it is said: They have belied the lord and said: it is not He.

Maimonides continues:

Aristotle has demonstrated that this opinion is inadmissible;<sup>65</sup> that it cannot be true that all things should have been generated by chance; and that on the contrary there is someone who orders and governs them. In what precedes we have already mentioned something of this.

Aristotle does not claim merely that the deity exists; rather he claims that there is a being who orders and governs things. The demonstration of this claim, the proof that not all things have been generated by chance, is offered in 2.20 (312–13). Quoting a passage from Aristotle's *Physics*, Maimonides argues that the regularity of the phenomena of the universe shows that they do not come into being by chance or spontaneity, but that they have a cause that renders it necessary for them to come into being.

But despite his support for Aristotle, Maimonides does not follow him completely in this matter. The necessity of which Aristotle speaks differs fundamentally from the will and purpose that he himself sees as underlying the generation of things. Maimonides is persuaded that necessity is not the whole story because of weaknesses he finds in the Aristotelian account. In regard to the heavens in particular, there are numerous irregularities which do not seem explainable on Aristotelian principles (2.19). Such irregularities might suggest that chance plays a role; but Maimonides does not contemplate a return to the Epicurean view. He formulates a third view which improves on Aristotle and Epicurus by combining the valid points of both and correcting the errors and excesses of both.<sup>66</sup> Just as the existence of some degree of irregularity contradicts Aristotle's theory of natural necessity, so too the existence of a large degree of regularity contradicts the Epicurean affirmation of chance. Maimonides argues that this combination of orderliness and disorderliness is exactly what we would expect from the purposeful acts of an intelligent being. He concludes that, "all this has been produced for an object that we do not know and is not an aimless or fortuitous act" (2.19, 310).

Aside from its metaphysical merits, Maimonides's theory offers valuable support for his twin program of Torah and natural science. One cannot study natural science if there is no order in the universe, and the truths one derives from such study cannot be eternal truths unless the order of the universe is an eternal one. One cannot strive for union with the active intellect if there is no active intellect guiding and influencing the sub-lunar realm. One cannot reasonably uphold the laws of the Torah if there is no divine lawgiver and no divine enforcer of the law; nor can one strive to resemble the divinity in one's actions if there is none. By affirming Aristotelian nature, Maimonides allows for the study of natural science; by diverging from Aristotle, recognizing the marginal role of disorder and attributing it to a purposeful divinity, Maimonides validates the Torah and justifies its use in educating, instructing, and guiding the members of the religious community towards their highest human potential. The validation of the law had already been accomplished in principle by the Kalām theologians; but by rejecting necessity and embracing a radical form of divine volition they had made natural science untenable. Maimonides's opposition to the Kalām thus has the same rationale as his opposition to Epicurus: both destroy science by denying the manifest reality of a largely ordered universe.<sup>67</sup>

Supporting the theological aims of Kalām,<sup>68</sup> but rejecting their physics, Maimonides found a way to affirm Aristotelian science as far as is justified while at the same time allowing room for a deity who supports the divine law. Divine will remains free, but it is the will of an intelligent being whose purposeful actions rarely diverge from the patterns of behavior that wisdom and necessity demand. Perhaps this is the reason that Maimonides considers the Epicurean opinion on providence worth mentioning: ultimately, in his emphasis on chance, Epicurus discovered important limitations to Aristotelian science and paved the way for the recognition of a divine being who acts both intelligently and purposefully.

There are however difficulties with Maimonides's disproof of the Epicurean theory of creation. After pointing out in *Guide* 2.20 that the natural things of the world do not come into existence by chance, Maimonides says, "Now if the particular things of the world are not due to chance, how can the whole of it be due to chance?" On the surface this is an argument from the part to the whole and concerns things generated in time. However, since it concerns the generation of the universe as a whole, it also

concerns the origin or creation of the world. But Maimonides has already argued (*Guide* 2.17) that no inference can be drawn from the nature of things as they are after they have come into existence to their nature when coming into being. Thus Maimonides's own argument for creation, which is based on the nature of things as they are, should not be valid. Indeed, if no inference can be derived from the nature of things as they are, Maimonides's demonstration of the existence of God is also in doubt. Maimonides assumed that if the world is temporal it must have a creator (1.71, 180–81). But the opinion that nothing can come into being spontaneously seems to be a conclusion based on observation of the world as it is, and therefore, by Maimonides's principle, not applicable to the time of the genesis of the world. It is not clear whether or not Maimonides was aware of this difficulty. If he was, he may have had more sympathy for Epicureanism than he admits.

The recognition that Epicurus revealed weaknesses in Aristotelianism provides one explanation for Maimonides's mentioning Epicurus. On the other hand, Maimonides may mention him simply in order to negate his theories forcefully, since heretical views did exist in the Islamic environment and needed to be addressed.<sup>69</sup> But there is a third reason why Maimonides mentions Epicurus, even when saying it is superfluous to do so. Maimonides seems to use Epicurus for the purpose of defending Aristotle. Many religious people of his time would have lumped the two Greek philosophers together as examples of foreign sources of heretical ideas. By distinguishing Epicurus's theories from those of Aristotle, Maimonides implies that there are significant differences between the two thinkers. An Aristotelian and an Epicurean, Maimonides makes clear, are two completely different things. Indeed, it is striking how many of Maimonides's thirteen principles of Jewish theology (*Commentary on the Mishnah*, Sanhedrin, 10) would be affirmed by Aristotle and how strongly his theory of providence resembles his own account of Aristotle's (*Guide* 3.17–18). By mentioning Epicurus, describing his theories in outline, and distinguishing them from those of Aristotle, Maimonides contributes to the rehabilitation of Aristotle.

**RABBI NACHMAN OF BRESLOV**

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Rabbi Nachman was a Chassidic teacher, the grandson of the founder of the Chassidic movement, Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer also known as “The Ba`al Shem Tov.” Living in the eighteenth century, he produced his work orally in the form of discourses that were recorded and published by his disciple Rabbi Nathan. These discourses are characterized by rich and evocative imagery and word play as well as profound psychological insight. Because of his unusual manner of expression it is not always possible to say exactly what he meant. Certainly, he did not express himself with the rigorous terminology usually associated with philosophers.

Rabbi Nachman’s discourses on *apiqorsut* (heresy or Epicureanism), like all of his discourses, evolved from the contemplation of the Jewish sources, including the kabbalistic literature. He would certainly have read of the concept of the empty space in his studies of Lurianic kabbala,<sup>70</sup> where it plays a key role in explaining the creation of the world. But unlike previous Jewish thinkers, Rabbi Nachman drew a connection between this empty space, which he calls the *halal hapanui*, and Epicureanism. It is not easy to know how he knew that Epicurus postulated the existence of an empty space, since this is not explicitly mentioned in any previous Jewish writing known to me. He may have inferred this from Maimonides’s discussion of the atomic theories of the Kalām, who also affirmed the void. Alternatively, he may have learned of Epicurean teachings through his contact with the secular learning of his time.

Rabbi Nachman writes about *apiqorsut* in three of his discourses in *Likutei Mohoran*, but I will focus on discourse 64 where he treats it at greatest length.<sup>71</sup> This discourse originated in speculation concerning statements found in Maimonides’s *Commentary on the Mishnah*. On the Mishnaic statement, “Know what to respond (*lehashiv*) to the Apiqoros,” Maimonides comments by quoting a biblical verse which in its original context warns against associating with a loose woman: “Those who come to her will not return (*lo yeshuvun*).” (Proverbs 2.19) He quotes this in order to support his opinion that those who entertain heretical thoughts can never return to the Jewish faith and that conversation with them is therefore forbidden. By a creative interpretation of the first passage, Rabbi Nachman brought the two passages into apparent contradiction. The word “to respond” (*lehashiv*) can also mean “to bring back” or “to cause to return.” Interpreted homiletically, therefore, the *Mishnah* says, “Know how to cause the Apiqoros to return,” a statement which seems to contradict

Maimonides's contention that those who entertain heretical thoughts can never return. How can one cause them to return if they cannot return? And especially if one is forbidden to speak to them?

Rabbi Nachman sharpens the question by positing two kinds of *apiqorsut*: one which is based on being (the so-called shattered vessels of creation), and can therefore be reconciled with revealed truth, and one which is based on non-being (the empty space), and therefore can never be reconciled with revealed truth—at least not before the last days. The former are difficult questions which are raised in the non-Jewish sciences or external wisdom. These questions are not insuperable for the human mind and do not contradict revealed truth. Since they are based on being they can be understood and explained in accordance with religious truth by the application of human intelligence.

The *apiqorsut* that stems from the empty space presents a more serious challenge since the questions it spawns cannot be answered. It is not merely the limitation of the human intellect that creates the difficulty. These questions are unanswerable because they are based on some aspect of being—or non-being—that really is, as it were, incompatible with religious truth. Because there is a space in which the divine is really absent, so to speak, there is a real basis for the heretical opinions that deny the presence of God. Relying on the Kabbalistic concept of retraction, he explains that it was necessary for God to create this empty space in order to allow the world to come into being. But because this secular reality was created by God, it offers no real contradiction to the belief in God. In effect, God has created an Epicurean universe within a larger divine reality. In this way Rabbi Nachman creates a theoretical explanation for all possible conflicts between the principles of Judaism and science.

Since God made the empty space, it is a created entity. Prior to the retraction this space was full, and even today the surrounding regions remain full of divinity. Using pseudo-geographical terminology, Rabbi Nachman argues that a sphere of emptiness or void surrounds our world, but beyond it is a realm of fullness. Since we are enclosed within this sphere of emptiness, we cannot perceive the fullness beyond. We gain contact with that divine realm only by means of faith. Faith enables us to cross the empty space and come into contact with the divine. Because Judaism promotes this faith, Jews are referred to in the Bible as Hebrews or “those who cross over.”



There is a parallel between this metaphysical discussion and classical religious discussions of free will. God's control of the universe has to be retracted to some degree in order to allow human beings to make free choices. Although this retraction is regrettable from one point of view, it is necessary for the creation of fully independent human beings. So too, the empty space of Rabbi Nachman is not only a metaphysical reality, it also has psychological and even sociological ramifications. The emptiness of our universe enables the possibility of contentions among Torah scholars, contentions that may seem entirely regrettable since they create an area of uncertainty concerning observance of the Torah and hence stimulate *apiqorsut*. As is clear from the manuscript version of this discourse, written by Rabbi Nachman himself and reproduced in the back of some editions of *Likutei Mohoran*, heretical questions stem both from the metaphysical empty space and from the empty space created by contentions among the legal scholars. These questions have some positive results, since they make room for creativity in human society, just as the original empty space made room for the creation of the world. But they also have negative results: individuals who become deeply involved in the questions that stem from the empty space are liable to become stuck forever in futile investigations and never gain apprehension of God. These are those who are referred to in the scriptural verse *All those who enter her will not return*. They will not return because they will find no evidence of God in such a region. How then can one cause them to return?

Since questions that arise from this source cannot be answered by the human intellect, Rabbi Nachman does not advise attempting to answer them. The proper response to the empty space is not an answer but silence.<sup>72</sup> Moses reached the highest level of human intellectual apprehension, and yet, as Rabbi Nachman argues, he too was unable to comprehend the empty space, and he therefore chose silence. Rabbi Nachman praises Moses for this attribute, which is evident in his biblical attribute of being hard of speech (*Ex. 4*) and in the Talmudic story in which God commands him to be silent in the face of a challenge to theodicy (*Menaḥot* 29b). This accords with Maimonides's injunction to avoid conversation with the *Apiqoros*. This silence itself has some power. Once one recognizes that the absence of God is a result of God's own retraction of his presence, one will cease to be disturbed by the prospect of the empty space. The presence of righteous individuals, who face the empty space

without disturbance, can retrieve many lost souls. In a sense, such individuals will have done what God could not do: they will have filled some part of the empty space with their presence.

There are more means as well. As Zvi Mark has argued, Rabbi Nachman does not completely deny the existence of divinity in the empty space.<sup>73</sup> In fact, no place can be completely empty of the divine presence, not even the *ḥalal hapanui*. And just as there is some trace of divinity in the empty space, so too silence is not the only appropriate response to it. What is necessarily absent from the empty space is not divinity, or even sound, but rather thought and speech. The silence that Rav Nachman demands is an absence of thought and speech, but it does not mean complete silence. In addition to their mere presence, the righteous have a special power to retrieve lost souls by the power of song. Even *apiqorsut* has its own corresponding music, as is evident from the story of Elisha ben Abuya who studied books of heresy and never ceased singing Greek poetry (*Hagigah* 15b). Although he is usually presented in Rabbinic literature as a heretic who never returned to the fold, Rabbi Nachman seems to indicate that his singing enabled him to escape the dangers of heresy, causing the books of the heretics to “fall” from him. The connection between silence and song is indicated by the fact that Moses himself, who was blessed by the attribute of silence, was also given the attribute of song (*Ex.* 15). By means of the music of the righteous, Rabbi Nachman suggests, it is possible to overcome the challenge posed by Maimonides’s stern warning that those who enter *apiqorsut* can never return while maintaining his injunction against speaking with them.

This discourse brings us back to the anecdotes about the Apikoros that we started with. Rabbi Nachman’s claim that there is a metaphysical basis for heretical opinions grants them a legitimacy that helps explain the semi-honorable status of the Apikoros in traditional orthodox society. Although the answers to which these questions naturally lead are wrong there is no rational way to know that. Anyone who thinks that it is possible to reconcile science and religion by reason has not only failed to understand science, he has also failed to consider the implications of the Lurianic kabbalah. For this reason, the true Apikoros would continue to observe the law despite his doubts. While acknowledging the seeming reality of this secular realm, Rabbi Nachman places it within a larger religious context of creationism. It is as if God has created a world in which divinity is absent, so to speak.

Within this seemingly contradictory metaphysical reality, the most righteous individuals are allowed and commanded to enter the realm of the seemingly secular. We asked above how Rabbi Nachman knew that Epicurus postulated the void. The answer seems to be that he entered this realm himself, that he had studied some of the secular sciences of his day, but that, like the wise head of a Rabbinic academy, he would not recommend such study to others. By remaining philosophically silent while discussing the nature of Epicureanism, in a form of literature that has affinities with song, he maintained a presence in the realm of *apiqorsut* that would retrieve many lost souls.

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<sup>2</sup> This kind of change in pronunciation is frequent in Hebrew since vowels are not indicated in most texts.

<sup>3</sup> *Ratsinu legadel dor shel Apiqorsim, ve yatsah lanu dor shel burim ve ammei ha'aratsot*. Apiqorsim is the plural form of Apiqoros. The statement is sometimes attributed to Ya'akov Ḥazan.

<sup>4</sup> In another version of the story the head of the academy asks the student where his heretical ideas come from. The student replies that he learned them from reading Maimonides, one of the most highly respected and most deeply learned Jewish authorities of all times. The head of the academy takes him aside and tells him: when you have as many merits as Maimonides you too may indulge in heretical thoughts.

<sup>5</sup> A young man from a small Lithuanian shtetl travelled to Vilna to meet the great Apiqoros of Vilna. He came to a synagogue where an old man, wearing a yarmulke and tzitzis, was stooped over a heavy, ancient tome. He waited patiently for the older man to finish praying, and then said, "Excuse

me, Sir. Do you know where I might find The Great Apiqoros of Vilna?” “Look no further,” came the measured reply. The young man was astonished. “You’re the Great Apiqoros? But, you’re wearing a yarmulke! And tzitzis! And you’re learning, and ... praying! What kind of an Apiqoros are you? I came all the way from Erzvilkas to meet you, only to find I’m already more of an Apiqoros than you are!” “And what should I be doing?” “What I do—smoke on Shabbat and eat pork on Yom Kippur. I would never be seen in shul and I *certainly* don’t learn Torah.” The Great Apiqoros nodded wisely. “Ah, that is the confusion. You see, I am an Apiqoros. You, sir, are a gentile.”

<sup>6</sup> See Kohut, *Aruch Completum*, 1.241–2; Jacobs, *Principles of the Jewish Faith*, 11–13; Geiger, “*LeToldot HaMunach Apiqoros*,” 499–500. Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 104 argues that the term is derived from the Aramaic root *pqr*, and speaks of a “phonetic coincidence with Epicurus the philosopher.” Sokoloff derives the term from Epicurus: *Dictionary*, 156.

<sup>7</sup> It is similar in use to Hebrew terms such as Yisrael, Edom, and Amaleq which can be used to refer to an individual member of the community.

<sup>8</sup> Rather than use Jewish dates, I will give dates in relation to the life of Rabbi Hillel, who flourished at about the time of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. The dates I offer are thus identical to those of the Christian calendar.

<sup>9</sup> For detailed arguments in support of this view, see Labendz, “‘Know What to Answer the Epicurean,’” 175–214.

<sup>10</sup> For the text of this *Mishnah* see the Kaufman manuscript. This and other translations from Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin sources are my own.

<sup>11</sup> Labendz argues that there is a further reason to think that the Epicurus is here imagined as a denier of divine providence. Since Rabbinic punishments are often designed to fit the crime, it is fitting that he who denies resurrection or providence should have no share of the world to come (182). But if this were the principle at work here, we would need to explain why those who deny the divinity of the Torah share the same punishment.

<sup>12</sup> All the elements in this passage of the *Mishnah*, including the uttering of a verse of Torah as a medicinal charm over a wound, can be seen as expressions of disrespect towards the Torah.

<sup>13</sup> In this early Tannaitic source the term *Apiqorsim* does not receive the definite article. This suggests that they are not a sect in the rabbinic imagination, but merely a kind of person. On the other hand see below on *Sifre Numbers*, 112.

<sup>14</sup> Labendz acknowledges that this list suggests that the author of this passage “meant to refer not only to the Epicurean denial of providence, but also to the hedonism, missionizing, or other aspects of Epicurean philosophy that offended the Rabbis” (“‘Know What to Answer the Epicurean,’” 184).

<sup>15</sup> Some manuscripts read *ba`al beritcha* (your ally). For the text of this *Mishnah*, see Strack, *Pirquei Avot*. See also Goldin, “A Philosophical Session in a Tannaitic Academy.” Most recently, see the scientific edition of *Avot* produced by Shimon Sharvit, *Mesechet Avot Le-Dorotheha*. Sharvit attributes this statement to Rabbi Eliezer rather than Rabbi Elazar.

<sup>16</sup> See previous note. On the general Hellenistic setting of *Avot*, see Tropper, *Wisdom, Politics and Historiography*.

<sup>17</sup> 180. See also Goldin, “A Philosophical Session in a Tannaitic Academy,” 62: “He is speaking of serious refutation of the Epicurean, and like a Stoic insists that there is a trustworthy God before whom we engage in our toiling.”

<sup>18</sup> The promise of a reward is more explicit in the printed version of the *Mishnah*, but even in the original *Mishnah* it is arguably there by implication.

<sup>19</sup> *Commentary on the Mishnah Avot* 2.14. None of these commentators understood the *Mishnah* as referring to the Apiqoros as a philosopher. Instead, he is a heretic who espouses the opinions of the non-Jews. In consequence, they do not understand Rabbi Elazar as advising his students to read

philosophic literature, but as advising his students to delve deeply into the study of the Torah in order to understand how to respond to heretical questions concerning the scriptures.

<sup>20</sup> Rabbeinu Baḥiya (*Commentary on Pirqei Avot*) suggested that the second elements concern the dangers of disputing theology with non-Jews, and constitute a warning that one must be willing to argue forcefully even if a successful dispute may lead to death at the hands of the non-Jews.

<sup>21</sup> See also Korman, *Ha-Emunah HaYisraelit*, 34: “The answer to the Apiqoros is to know that ‘your taskmaster is faithful to pay,’ for this is the utter opposite of the Epicurean idea, which does not recognize providence.” I am grateful to Tsvi Mauer for this reference.

<sup>22</sup> This interpretation is noted as the apparent meaning of the *Mishnah* by Rabbi Shimon ben Zemach Duran, but he rejects it in favor of the opinion of Rabbeinu Yonah and Maimonides on the grounds that this interpretation would make the passage unified in its teaching, whereas he would have expected three distinct teachings.

<sup>23</sup> The affirmation of reward and punishment is a common motif in much Rabbinic literature, and its presence in a *Mishnah* which speaks of the Apiqoros is not especially significant and does not need to reflect any awareness of the teachings of Epicurus. The existence and providence of God are major themes in *Avot* 2.1, 2.4, 2.6, 2.15, 2.16, 3.1, 3.15, 3.16, 4.16, 4.17, and one could hardly claim that all of these are responses to Epicureanism. Even if we did interpret R. Elazar’s injunctions as directed specifically against Epicureans, it would show only a superficial familiarity with their denial of providence.

<sup>24</sup> But see Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy*, who argues that the story of the four who entered *pardes* refers to entry into the Epicurean school. Goldin has argued that the odd manner of producing the negative for each of the positive traits in *Avot* 2.9 reflects Stoic manners of speech. But the Stoic texts that Goldin cites are actually quite different from the *Mishnah* passage. They do not offer two complementary suggestions (do *x* and don’t do non-*x*), but rather they describe the nature of a virtue and then the nature of the corresponding vice. Nor do they contain the “go out and see” element which resembles a folklore motif (I owe this observation to Prof. Alexander Kulik). The Rabbinic passage is more closely paralleled in other Rabbinic passages, such as *Avot* 3.5, 3.9, 4.6, 4.9, 4.11, 4.13, 4.15, 4.20. Since it has no close parallels in Hellenistic literature, it should be recognized as a Rabbinic mode of expression. It may be derived from the biblical text which sometimes formulates commands in both positive and negative form: compare Deuteronomy 28:3 with Deuteronomy 28:16, for example.

<sup>25</sup> Nor do we have fragments of Greek philosophy in Hebrew or Aramaic script. I have argued elsewhere, however, that a quotation from Aristotle is found in a Rabbinic compilation. See G. Danzig, “What to say when you don’t have a good answer: Rabbi Hoshaya and the philosopher.”

<sup>26</sup> Labendz argues that the Epicureans initiated debates with the Rabbis, and that “the Rabbis in turn apparently did not take these encounters lightly, and engaged in debate with Epicureans” (180). But there is no evidence of such debates ever taking place in Tannaitic times, as Labendz acknowledges (n. 19).

<sup>27</sup> In itself, this is not strong evidence concerning the character of the Epicurean challenges to the Tannaim, since this material was compiled hundreds of years later and may well represent a misunderstanding of what the Tannaim were referring to. But the portrait does make sense. Since the Rabbis were involved in teaching Torah it stands to reason that attacks on them would concern the subject matter they were teaching, not physics or metaphysics.

<sup>28</sup> This change apparently occurred in two stages. The Kaufman codex of the *Mishnah* has the original wording with the word Torah added in the margin. At a later stage the words “and know” were added. (See Goldin, “A Philosophical Session in a Tannaitic Academy,” 61 n. 24).

<sup>29</sup> Such poring over the Torah is recommended in other contexts as well, such as in the famous saying of ben Bag Bag (*Avot* 5.22).



<sup>30</sup> See the comments of Rabbeinu Yonah on this *Mishnah*; see also *Midrash Shemuel*. As my wife has pointed out, since there is substantial evidence that Epicureans heaped scorn and ridicule on all kinds of authoritative teachings (see below), the reminder that there is a taskmaster or ally may serve also to restore a sense of gravity to any students who do come into contact with them.

<sup>31</sup> See also *Nedarim* 23a, where they are said to cause pain to the Rabbis (*metsa`arei rabanan*).

<sup>32</sup> “Were *apiqoros* a clearly defined term, no definition would be needed or offered, as is the case in the tannaitic sources about it” (Labendz, “‘Know What to Answer the Epicurean,’” 192; see also her stronger claim on 188). The fact that the Amoraim derive the term *Apiqoros* from the Hebrew root *pqr* (*Sanhedrin* 38b) provides some evidence that they were unaware of Epicureans at all. But on the other hand it may only be an example of self-consciously creative homiletic Rabbinic exegesis.

<sup>33</sup> Although these reports may well be exaggerated, even partisans such as Dewitt acknowledge Epicurus’s lack of respect for his own teachers (*Epicurus and His Philosophy*, 13–15).

<sup>34</sup> Since in her view there was no possibility of contact between the Amoraim and the Epicureans (“‘Know What to Answer the Epicurean,’” 175–76; 192), Labendz explains that the Amoraim reached these accurate conclusions in part on the basis of a misinterpretation of the earlier *Sifre* passage. She notes that the *Sifre* passage could not in itself serve as a good source for later rabbinic knowledge of Epicurean attitude problems, since it only describes them as disobedient to the Law not as disrespectful to the Rabbis (193 n. 44). She therefore postulates the existence of oral traditions handed down from Tannaitic times (193). This is of course possible; but this knowledge may be better seen as reflecting the continued existence of some Epicurean cult in the land of Israel. If there were oral traditions descending from Tannaitic times, this would strongly suggest that the Tannaim, from whom such traditions would have hypothetically derived, viewed the *Apiqorsim* as disrespectful to the Rabbis and not merely as disobedient to the Law. Labendz argues that this feature would have been only one part of the Tannaitic conception of the *Apiqoros*—in addition presumably to their philosophic doctrines—although later it came to dominate (193). But we have not seen good evidence that the Tannaim knew their philosophic doctrines.

<sup>35</sup> This difference could be explained as an historical change in behavior on the part of *Apiqorsim* or as resulting merely from the fuller discussions recorded in Amoraitic times. In any case, both groups agree in focusing on the behavior or social characteristics of *Apiqorsim* rather than on their theoretical doctrines.

<sup>36</sup> As Labendz notes, the Amoraitic passages differ in the severity of the offense that renders one an *Apiqoros*. In some cases, an *Apiqoros* is one who ridicules Rabbinic authority altogether. In other cases, it is enough to make a mildly offensive statement, even unintentionally. This second phenomenon could be explained as an historical change in the perception of the *Apiqoros*, but it could also be explained as a homiletic device designed to persuade students to be careful with their tongues.

<sup>37</sup> We have no way of knowing whether R’ Yirmeyah ben Elazar was related to R’ Elazar ben Arakh, as his name suggests. If he was, it is possible that he preserves a family tradition concerning the *Apiqoros*.

<sup>38</sup> I will not discuss the previous Talmudic passage concerning the house and the dome, since I am not convinced that it is directly related to the *Apiqoros*. It does not mention the *Apiqoros*, and it may have been inserted into its present location merely because it contains the motif “a house that is full” of something.

<sup>39</sup> There may be an additional point to this last example. Here the quality under consideration is a negative one—an infection with a disease known as *zara'at*. The fact that the winning example concerns the spread of a malignancy to the entire body seems to suggest the likely results of a successful revolution. Rather than creating a society of wise and kingly members, as his earlier examples suggest he will do, the equality Korach preaches is destined merely to spread malignancy throughout the Israelite body politic.



<sup>40</sup> Stowers, *Letter Writing in Ancient Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 66.

<sup>41</sup> Bowditch, *Horace and the Gift Economy of Patronage*, 175. See also Bryant, *Moral Codes and Social Structure in Ancient Greece*, 422.

<sup>42</sup> We may note here that strictly speaking this source stands in contradiction to the *Mishnah*. While the *Mishnah* distinguishes between the one who says there is no Torah from heaven and the Apikoros, the Talmudic passage identifies them. These two passages probably influenced Maimonides's formulation of the category of the Apikoros, and may have led him to describe the category of the Apikoros as including more than just the denial of prophecy. See below.

<sup>43</sup> A similar critique of Epicureanism is found in Plutarch, *Against Colotes*. For an alternative interpretation of this episode see Becker, "'Epicureer' im Talmud Yerushalmi," 397–421. Becker argues that the swallowing up of Korach is an expression of divine providence, and hence a refutation of the Epicurean position. But Korach did not challenge divine providence.

<sup>44</sup> *kophrei haphilosophim* or *kophrei haphilosophia* (*Emunah Ramah*, Introduction to the second treatise). It is not clear whether he means that they denied the teachings of the philosophers, or that they were philosophers who denied religious teachings, either of which would be appropriate.

<sup>45</sup> *paqar tefei*: *Sanhedrin* 38b. The fact that there can be non-Jewish Apiqorsim seems to show that they constitute a coherent, independent group, and are not simply Jewish heretics.

<sup>46</sup> *He-aruch Hashalem*, above, n. 3.

<sup>47</sup> See Laws of Ritual Slaughter, 4.14; Laws of Robbery, 11.2; Laws of Murder, 4.10.

<sup>48</sup> This is someone who may accept the existence of God, the principle of prophecy, and even that Moses was a prophet, but nonetheless, like some Muslim theologians, denies that the Torah is a valid record of such prophecy. The Apikoros, on the other hand, objects to all forms of prophecy, Jewish and non-Jewish. Given Maimonides's definition of a divine law in the *Guide* (2.40), it would be theoretically possible for an Apikoros to accept the divinity of the Torah even though he denies the prophecy of Moses, since a divine law is defined by its attributes not its author.

<sup>49</sup> The *Lehem Mishneh* argues that in Maimonides's view the term Apikoros can be used in both strict and loose senses. He argues further that since the Talmud orders death to the Apikoros (*Mesechet Avodah Zarah*, 26b: in Maimonides's text the term Apikoros appeared here), his crime must be more serious than disrespect to the Torah. But while this may explain why Maimonides did not accept the Talmudic definition of the Apikoros, it does not explain how he reached his own definition (see Abraham Yehoshua Heshel, *Sanhedri Ketanah*).

<sup>50</sup> In fact, the historical Epicurus and his followers did believe in the existence of gods; but these gods were so different from any biblical or even Aristotelian conception of god that in a sense Maimonides is justified in claiming that they denied the existence of God. It was common in late antiquity to accuse the Epicureans of atheism. See, e.g., Plutarch, *Against Colotes*.

<sup>51</sup> See his introduction to *Pereq Heleq*. See also the comment of Marc Shapiro, "For his own conceptual reasons, which have no talmudic basis, Maimonides distinguishes between the *epikoros*, the *min*, and the *kofer batorah*." Shapiro, *The Limits of Orthodox Theology*, 8 n. 27.

<sup>52</sup> Maimonides's list of heretics in the *MT* thus provides a categorization of his own fundamental principles that anticipates Joseph Albo's later efforts.

<sup>53</sup> He may also have been helped by the fact that the Talmud refers to non-Jewish Apiqorsim. Such Apiqorsim presumably would not be defined merely by their failure to respect Jewish law.

<sup>54</sup> He also omits the denial of creation, both here and in his list of thirteen principles, at least in its original formulation. Later, Maimonides revised this section of his thirteen principles in order to imply creation.

<sup>55</sup> It is also true that no denial of divine knowledge is attributed to the Apikoros in the Talmud. However, Maimonides considered prophecy to be closely connected with divine knowledge.

<sup>56</sup> See Pines, *Studies in Islamic Atomism*; Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalām*; and Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām*.

<sup>57</sup> One source of information on Epicurus is Alexander of Aphrodisias's work *On Providence*, a work which is extant only in Arabic (see the recent Italian edition: edited by Fazzo and Zonta). Although Maimonides mentions a text by this name as his source for some of his knowledge of Epicurean speculation, the text we have today does not seem to have been his main source. While Alexander attributes atomism in the first place to Leucippus and Democritus, Maimonides does not seem to have been aware of these names. As Tzvi Langerman has shown, Galen's writings were also an important source of knowledge of Epicurean doctrines (Langerman, "Islamic Atomism and the Galenic Tradition").

<sup>58</sup> Possibly, Kalām writers were hesitant to mention Epicurus because so much of their own physical doctrine resembled his and they may have been reluctant to acknowledge this ancestry of their religious doctrines. Alternatively, Muslim writers may not have been as interested in Epicurus as Jews were: since Epicurus is mentioned occasionally in Jewish Tannaitic and Amoraitic literature, Jewish writers had a special reason to report information about him.

<sup>59</sup> They also transformed the principle of chance into the principle of divine will. As we will see below, Rav Nachman also suggests the creation of an Epicurean universe by the deity.

<sup>60</sup> The Kabbalistic statement that there is no place that is empty of divinity (*Tiqqunei Zohar*, 57), whether understood in a theological or a physical sense, may reflect a similar polemic. As we will see, the existence of a void became a serious theological problem for Lurianic Kabbalah and Rabbi Nachman of Breslov.

<sup>61</sup> Maimonides also draws a connection between the Kalām denial of the reliability of the senses, and the theories of the Greek sophists: "You know that this theory is very ancient, and was the pride of the sophists, who asserted that they themselves were its authors; this is stated by Galenus in his treatise on natural forces; and you know well what he says of those who will not admit the evidence of the senses" (1.73, *in fine*).

<sup>62</sup> Since this proof was based on the eternity of the universe, however, it would not disprove a modified Epicureanism which held, like Kalām, that the world has a temporal beginning. The Kalām theory of creation thus asserts a form of Epicureanism which is invulnerable to Maimonides's Aristotelian demonstration of God's existence, even if Maimonides has other objections to it.

<sup>63</sup> Maimonides assumes that the existence of God contradicts Epicurean theory. He may not have been aware that Epicurus posited the existence of gods—classical sources sometimes described Epicureans as atheists. But since the Epicurean gods played no role in governing the world, his statement that they denied the existence of a governor is correct. His statement that they do not believe in God (2.32) is correct in the sense that they did not believe in a god who could be a source of prophecy. In *MT*, on the other hand, as we have seen, he does not attribute atheism to the *Apiqoros*.

<sup>64</sup> Strauss suggests that Maimonides uses Epicurus to create five opinions in *Guide* 3.17 in order to provide a superficial parallel to the five opinions he lists in *Guide* 3.23 as occurring in the book of Job. See Strauss, "Der Ort Vorsehungslehre nach der Ansicht Maimunis," 37; in the English translation, 544 n. 20.

<sup>65</sup> Maimonides appears to have believed that Epicurus lived prior to Aristotle. He may have assumed that Epicurus is the object of Aristotle's arguments in *Physics* 2, and he does not seem to have been aware of the existence of Leucippus and Democritus.

<sup>66</sup> This is, incidentally, his regular method in resolving Talmudic disputes. See Levinger, *Darchei ha-maḥashavah ha-hilchatit shel ha-Rambam*; meḥqar 'al ha-methodah shel Mishneh Torah.

<sup>67</sup> From the point of view of natural science, the doctrine of a capricious divine will is little more than a religious version of the Epicurean doctrine of chance. The sole difference between them is a

subjective one: while those of religious faith attribute random events to an unfathomable deity, those lacking in faith attribute them to chance.

<sup>68</sup> “For I reach the goal that every Mutakallim desires, without abolishing the nature of existence and without disagreeing with Aristotle with regard to any point that he has demonstrated” (1.71, 182).

<sup>69</sup> See Stroumsa, “Elisha ben Abuyah and Muslim Heretics in Maimonides’ Writings.”

<sup>70</sup> See *Eitz Haim*, *heichal aleph kuf*, *anaf beit* where it is called *maqom panui* or *ḥalal reiqani*.

<sup>71</sup> For a useful review of the literature on the interpretation of this important discourse, see Goshen-Gottstein, “Speech, Silence, Song,” 143–88.

<sup>72</sup> In the manuscript version of this discourse, Rabbi Nachman explains that silence is appropriate also because the empty space was created before the world. Speech however was used only in the creation of the world, not in the creation of the empty space.

<sup>73</sup> Mark, *Mysticism and Madness in the Work of Rav Nachman of Breslov* (Heb. 257–80; English trans. ch. 4).

## CHAPTER 23

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# EARLY CHRISTIANITY

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ILARIA RAMELLI

MANY fragments and testimonies in Usener's fundamental collection *Epicurea*<sup>1</sup> come from ancient Christian sources, from Clement of Alexandria to Maximus the Abbot, from Lactantius to Jerome to Theodoret, from Tertullian to Origen, from Hippolytus to Augustine, from Theophilus to Nemesius, from Eusebius to John Chrysostom and Ps. Chrysostom, from Ambrose to Salvianus of Marseilles and Boethius, from Justin Martyr to Dionysius of Alexandria, to some Byzantine gnomologia and the *Suda*. Most of these come from Clement, Origen, Eusebius, Lactantius, and Augustine, but other Fathers should be added, such as Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa. Even if Patristic interest in Epicureanism is often critical, and sometimes imprecise or distorted, nevertheless it is tangible.<sup>2</sup>

Norman DeWitt argued that the teachings of Epicurus were well known to Paul, as well as to many people in his day, and are reflected in Paul's letters, from Galatians to Philippians to 1 Corinthians, and Jack Hannah more recently argued for an Epicurean interpretation of the figure of Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas*.<sup>3</sup> The author of what became the canonical Acts of the Apostles, toward the end of the first century (or perhaps, as some critics contend, at the beginning of the second)<sup>4</sup> depicted the Epicureans as attentive hearers of the Christian message at the very beginning of its being

preached, around 50 CE, in the key episode of the apostle Paul's speech in Athens in Acts 17:18–34. This is the grounding and inspiring text for Patristic philosophy: Paul expounds the Christian doctrine before philosophers and (at least in the intention of the author of Acts) in philosophical terms, in the city that was the heart of the Greek philosophical tradition, the city not only of the Academy, the Lyceum, and the Stoa, but of Epicurus's Garden as well. Although most of Patristic philosophy will be Platonic, the author of Acts, remarkably, does not speak of Platonists, but only of Epicureans and Stoics as the Athenian philosophers interested in what Paul had to say about theology.<sup>5</sup> The Epicureans are even mentioned first. According to the account of Acts, some among "the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers" heard Paul preach in Athens and wondered what that "babbler" who "picked up scraps of knowledge" (σπερμολόγος) had to say. They noticed that he seemed to introduce "foreign deities" (ξένων δαιμονίων); this is why they brought him onto the Areopagus, either for intellectual curiosity or, according to some, for a trial with the accusation of introducing new divinities.<sup>6</sup> They invited him to expound his "new teaching" (καὶνὴ διδασχὴ) to them, with contents that to them were strange (ξενίζοντα). Later anti-Christian polemics will be replete with the notion that Christianity was something new and extraneous to the Greek tradition.<sup>7</sup> But the author of Acts, perhaps because he was already facing such accusations, depicts Paul as endeavoring to present the Christian message in terms that were familiar to the Greek philosophical tradition, and not only the Stoic, as is usually remarked, but, as I shall point out, also the Epicurean.<sup>8</sup> Thus, he identified the "unknown god" to whom an altar was dedicated in Athens with the Jewish-Christian divinity, who created all and continues to vivify all, who needs nothing and does not abide in human handicrafts, but in whom, rather, human beings "live, move, and exist." At this point, a verse is even added which is commonly considered to be a Stoic quotation, from Aratus *Phaen.* 5,<sup>9</sup> perhaps indirectly,<sup>10</sup> or even from Cleanthes: "We are also the offspring" of that divinity (τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἑσμέν).

In the account of Acts 17, Paul's speech goes on with the announcement of the final Judgment and of the resurrection of Jesus and the dead. Here Paul's discourse broke, since the notion of resurrection was incompatible with the thought of his hearers, both Stoics and Epicureans alike. They said

they would listen to Paul on another occasion on this point.<sup>11</sup> The Epicureans denied that one's conscience can continue to exist after death; this is also why they didn't believe in punishments or rewards "in the other world" (αἰώνια; cf., e.g., Epicurus *Ep. Hdt.* 81) and thought that the only eternally existing (αἰδία) realities were atoms and void (see, for instance, *Ep. Hdt.* 44; Usener 317).<sup>12</sup> Stoics also regarded human souls as material and doomed to dissolve at a certain point. They did admit of an apokatastasis or palingenesis, but at the end of a cosmic cycle. The term ἀποκατάστασις is used by Eusebius, *PE* 15.19.1–3, referring to the Stoics' cosmological conception of the cyclical return of the universe to its original condition at the end of every great year. Their use of this term was related to its astronomical meaning, one of the many this noun had in antiquity. The noun ἀποκατάστασις in Stoic cosmology indicates the repetition of a cosmic cycle (SV 2.599, 2.625),<sup>13</sup> based on eons (αἰῶνες) or "great years" that return always identical with one another, or almost identical,<sup>14</sup> with the same events and the same people, who have the same behaviors, forever and ever. These cycles depend on periodical conflagrations (ἐκπυρώσεις) in which everything is dissolved into fire, which is ether and the Logos, and then expands again, creating a new world. The Stoics, in turn, were inspired by Heraclitus in respect to the conflagration,<sup>15</sup> and by the Pythagoreans especially for the notion of the "Great Year." They also seem to have drawn from Empedocles the idea of cosmic cycles based on a swing in the prevalence of Philia or Neikos.<sup>16</sup> The Stoic apokatastasis doctrine, with its infinite sequence of eons, and its necessitarianism, was criticized by Origen, who endeavored to establish a different, Christian model (see, e.g., *CC* 4.12, 4.67–68, 5.20; *Prin.* 2.3).<sup>17</sup>

Epicureans and Stoics did not admit of a resurrection from the dead, but they did admit of, and were interested in, a theological discourse. This is why Paul, according to Acts 17, in Athens had in fact a partial success.<sup>18</sup> Some of his hearers did not accept his announcement of the resurrection, but he was not lampooned for the theological exposition that preceded it. This was quite acceptable to both Epicureans and Stoics, and indeed Paul attempted to adapt it, not only to Stoic theology, but also, as I shall argue, to the Epicurean.

In Judaism, even if Judaism was Hellenized in Paul's time,<sup>19</sup> Epicureanism was execrated not only for the denial of the resurrection—

which was denied also by a Jewish “sect” (αἵρεσις), notoriously that of the Sadducees—and of a personal survival in the afterlife, but also for the denial of divine providence and of the creation of the world by God. Therefore, the Epicureans were considered to be destined to damnation after death. However, precisely in that they were no atheists in the least (Philo himself, at least formally, did not accuse Epicurus of atheism), they were interested in listening to what Paul had to say about God.<sup>20</sup> Exactly in the time of Paul, the Roman Stoic Seneca much valued Epicureanism and was concerned about the misunderstanding it suffered at the hands of many.<sup>21</sup> The same misunderstandings would surface again, sometimes even intensified, among early Christian authors.

Indeed, the Epicureans could be interested in Paul’s theological discourse in that they denied providence, but not the existence of deities. And the author of Acts, between the first and the second century, seems to have been well aware of this, in spite of the accusations of atheism that circulated against Epicurus and his followers, long before, and independently of, Jewish and Christian accusations (see, for instance, Arrighetti fr. 177 and 179). Epicurus’s and the Epicureans’ interest in theology and their admission of the existence of divinities is indeed well attested in Epicurus’s own fragments<sup>22</sup> and in Philodemus (*On Gods* 3, col. 10.34–38).<sup>23</sup> Epicurus thinks that simulacra come to human beings from the divinities, composed by finest and subtlest atoms, which constitute a “quasi-body,” endowed with a “quasi-blood.”<sup>24</sup> These simulacra come from the intermundia and can reach humans while they are awake and while they are asleep;<sup>25</sup> thence comes the human notion of the divinities, a “clear” or “manifest” (ἐναργής) pre-notion. Due to the fineness of those simulacra, human beings cannot grasp them by means of their sense-perception, but by a representative intuition of their mind (ἐπιβολὴ φανταστικῇ τῆς διανοίας).<sup>26</sup> Pre-notions of the gods are common to all human beings, independently of their culture and race. Epicurus even produces a proof of the existence of the gods in Usener 352, preserved by Cicero *ND* 1.16.43, who translates πρόληψις by *anticipatio*: the very universality of these pre-notions of the divinities proves the existence of the gods. Another way to arrive at the deities, according to Epicurus, is by inference: on the basis of the principle of *isonomia* or equivalence in the universe, human beings in the world(s) must correspond to the same number of divinities in the



intermundia.<sup>27</sup> The loss of atoms due to the continual emanation of simulacra is compensated by an uninterrupted inflow; this is why the deities are never destroyed (Cic. *ND* 1.19.50, 39.109): they push away destructive atoms (Arrighetti fr. 183).<sup>28</sup>

The gods not only exist, according to Epicurus, but they are also models of happiness, and therefore they serve as ethical models for human beings.<sup>29</sup> However, since their perfect happiness rests on their *ataraxia* (Arrighetti fr. 184),<sup>30</sup> they cannot care for humans and their vicissitudes. Hence the Epicurean doctrine of the absence of providence and of teleology, as well as the denial of Fate and divination.<sup>31</sup> The rejection of Fate surely encountered Christian approval; Patristic authors such as (in chronological order) Bardaisan, Origen, Diodore of Tarsus, and Gregory of Nyssa all engaged in refutations of the doctrine of Fate, especially as based on astral and climatic determinism.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, the denial of providence and of teleology caused a recurrent, as well as undeserved, accusation of atheism to be leveled against Epicurus,<sup>33</sup> to the point that his name repeatedly appears in lists of ancient atheists—those which often were known, directly or indirectly, to early Christian authors as well. Nevertheless, Philodemus attests that Epicurus even observed traditional public worship, and recommended that his followers do the same; his reverence for the divinities, “supremely good and happy natures,” is confirmed by other attestations.<sup>34</sup> Epicurus’s statement in *Ep. Men.* 124, that “the impious is not the person who eliminates the deities of the populace, but the one who ascribes to the divinities the conceptions of the populace,” sounds like a reply to a charge of impiety, obviously already circulating in Epicurus’s own day; a similar self-apologetic aim might characterize Epicurus’s criticism of Prodicus, Diagoras, and Critias in Book 12 of his *On Nature*: “Just as he does in Book 12 as well, he blames Prodicus, Diagoras, Critias, and the others [sc. atheists], saying that they are delirious and mad, and assimilates them to Bacchae” (Usener 87 = Arrighetti fr.27.2).<sup>35</sup> Plutarch (*Non posse* 21.1102B = p. 103.7–22 Usener), a hostile source, avers that Epicurus pretended to worship the gods publicly for fear. In Usener 384, Plutarch remarks that, in order to eliminate the fear of the divinities, it is better to believe that they do not exist, rather than denying their providence. Indeed, the tradition concerning Epicurus’s atheism, which will prevail in Christian authors, is already attested by

Cicero (Arrighetti fr. 177), “Aetius” (Usener 393), and Diogenes Laertius 2.97 (= Usener 391), according to whom Epicurus was inspired by the atheist Theodore,<sup>36</sup> as well as by Sextus Empiricus AM 9.58, omitted by both Usener and Arrighetti: “According to some, Epicurus admits the existence of the divinity while addressing the crowd, but he did not at all admit it while explaining the nature of reality.”<sup>37</sup>

In Arrighetti fr. 180, Epicurus warns readers as follows: “Do not contaminate the divine with fallacious human opinions.” This is in line with what he says in *Ep. Men.* (123–24):

Maintain, first of all, that the divinity is an incorruptible and perfectly happy living being, in accord with the common concept of the divinity, and do not attach to it anything that is extraneous to incorruptibility or alien to beatitude, but entertain about it notions that can preserve beatitude together with incorruptibility. For the divinities do exist, since the cognition of them is manifest, but they are not as most people consider them to be ... . And impious are not those who deny the existence of the deities worshipped by the people, but those who ascribe to the divinities the opinions of the populace. For the assertions of most people concerning the divinities are not pre-notions, but false assumptions.

Indeed, not only did Epicurus admit of the existence of the deities, but he also had a high conception of them; he refused to regard them as envious or vengeful, in line with the more popular opinion, or implacable, according to astral theology,<sup>38</sup> or adulterous and the like, in accord with poetic and mythical representations of divinities, which Stoicism explained away with recourse to allegory,<sup>39</sup> but Epicureanism did not.

The most famous expression of Epicurus’s theology—and one of not many, after all, because of the loss of his treatises *On Gods*, *On Piety*, and *On Sanctity*—is the first *Key Doctrine*, which establishes both the existence of the divinities and the denial of divine providence:

What is supremely happy and incorruptible neither has troubles itself nor causes troubles to anyone else; thus, it is not prey to either anger or favor. For everything of this kind is found in a weak subject.

It is remarkable that the very first of the *Key Doctrines* concerns the gods and the correct notions one should have regarding them. Paul’s statement in Acts 17:25, which is represented as uttered before Epicureans and Stoics, that the divinity needs nothing, in fact echoes the Epicurean notion of the divine.<sup>40</sup> Usener 38, from Epicurus’s *On Sanctity*, cited by Philodemus,

describes the divinity exactly in this way: it “needs nothing” of human things. This is repeated in a more circumstantial form in Usener 386, again preserved by Philodemus: the divine “needs no honor.” Likewise, in Usener 371, preserved by a Christian author such as Lactantius, *Inst.* 7.5.3, Epicurus describes the divinity as perfectly happy and such as to need absolutely nothing. In their *autarkeia*, the divinities are also models of *autarkeia* for human beings (see, e.g., *Ep. Men.* 130–31; Usener 458–59, 466, 471, 476, 602; *KD* 21). Paul would seem to cite Epicurus’s words directly, when depicting the divinity in his theological exposition at the Areopagus in Acts 17 as “needing nothing” but rather providing its creatures with existence, life, and movement. Indeed, in the very same years, Seneca, the “Epicurizing” Stoic, interestingly echoed, it seems, Epicurus’s idea in passages in which his own criticism of traditional pagan cults is expounded, especially in *Ep. ad Luc.* 95.47–50:

The divinity is worshipped by those who know it. Let us forbid anyone to bring linens and scrubbers to Jupiter and to bear the mirror for Juno; *the divinity has no need of people who serve it*. Why not? *It is rather the divinity itself who is of service to humanity* . . . . The first act of worship rendered to the divinities is to believe that they exist; then to recognize their majesty, and to recognize their goodness, in the absence of which no majesty can exist . . . whoever imitates them worships them enough.<sup>41</sup>

That this notion of the divinity as needing nothing is more Epicurean than Stoic is also proved by its absence from the fragments of the Old Stoics (*SVF*), where the opposite is in fact indicated. Two fragments from Chrysippus, indeed, claim that the gods created the human beings for their own advantage, thus implying that they needed them (*SVF* 2.1152, preserved by Porphyry, *Abst.* 3.20), and that the gods need food, therefore suggesting that they need sacrifices from humans who worship them (*SVF* 2.1068, preserved by Plutarch *Stoic. Rep.* 39.1052b).

Indeed, as I shall also exemplify in a moment, Epicurus’s criticism of traditional pagan religion and belief was appreciated by Christian authors, for the same reason for which Seneca’s analogous criticism (which I think owed something to Epicureanism) was appreciated by Christians,<sup>42</sup> to the point that Tertullian labeled Seneca *saepe noster* (“Seneca often speaks like a Christian,” *De anima* 20) and Lactantius declared that Seneca “said so many things on God that are similar to Christian doctrines” (*quam multa . . . de Deo nostris similia locutus est*; *Inst.* 1.5.28), so that he “could have been

a worshiper of the true God, if anyone had taught him who this God is” (*potuit esse veri Dei cultor, si quis illi monstrasset, Inst.* 6.24.14).<sup>43</sup>

The second-century Platonizing apologist Justin Martyr, and perhaps, later on, Origen, who called the “Middle Platonist” Celsus “Epicurean” (see below), like many others, provide excellent examples of how the label “Epicurean” could assume a vague meaning, endowed with an offensive hue, implying for instance materialism, hedonism, or agnosticism, or even atheism, rather than referring to specific philosophical doctrines upheld by Epicurus or his followers. Justin associates Epicurus with hedonism generally in his *First Apology* (7.3, 12.5, and 15.3). Yet, neither Justin nor, much less, Origen were ignorant in fact of philosophy. But they were Platonists. Indeed, Justin has been demonstrated to be using Platonizing motifs, of the kind attested in Plutarch and elsewhere, against Epicureanism. This is something that Christian authors often did. For Origen himself, Celsus was close to being a kind of prototype of the pagan who combats divine revelation.

Epicureanism was even associated with Christian “heresies” as an object of denigration from the second century onward. Thus, Irenaeus describes the “Gnostics”<sup>44</sup> as “Epicureans” owing to their denial of divine providence (*AH* 3.24.2). Epicureanism was construed as an enemy of Christianity, as the doctrine of pleasure and the refusal of divine revelation, even if the Epicureans were not at all atheists; according to the author of Acts, Epicureans and Stoics, not Platonists, were interested in Paul’s teaching in Athens; and Paul, besides quoting a Stoic or Stoicizing verse, clearly alluded to an Epicurean theological doctrine, as I argued above. This is perfectly in line with his public on that occasion, among which the Epicureans are the very first to be mentioned by the author of Acts.

Again in the second century, a non-Christian author like Lucian reflects an interesting association between Christians and Epicureans, in that they were both considered to be “atheists,” even though neither group, of course, was. But the accusation of “atheism” was easy to level against adversaries, such as “pagans” against Christians, or Christians and non-Epicurean “pagans” against Epicureans. In the case of the crowds described by Lucian in his *Alexander*, both the Christians and the Epicureans are felt to be atheists in that they refuse to practice the traditional worship. This is why only the Epicureans and the Christians do not adhere to the new religion

that Alexander has founded in Pontus. This may suggest that for second-century Christian authors Epicureanism was still a vital force to fight.

Bardaisan of Edessa († 222) was a Christian philosopher indebted to Middle Platonism, who read the Genesis account of creation in the light of Plato's *Timaeus* and developed a conception of Christ-Logos as the cosmic Christ in the complex framework of the correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, he didn't hesitate, as it seems, to take up atomism,<sup>46</sup> even if not exactly in the form it had in Epicurus. This is in line with his notion, which is suggested by the fragments from his *Domnus*, of all creatures as diastematic and corporeal, only God being incorporeal (and the Ideas in the Logos of God). He shared this theory, that only God is absolutely incorporeal and all creatures are material to different degrees, with his quasi-contemporary Origen of Alexandria.<sup>47</sup> Bardaisan posited some "beings" (also corresponding to the "elements," plus darkness) that are creatures of God but existed prior to the constitution of this world. According to Ephrem's testimony, each of the beings which, together with darkness, form the *hwl'* (Syriac transliteration of Greek ὕλη, "matter": see Ephrem *Prose Refutations* 1 p. 141.9–17), is constituted by *atoms* endowed with a particular color, which expresses their respective qualities: water is green, air/gust is blue, fire is red, and light is white. Likewise, the atoms of each "being" have a particular sound, smell, taste, and form (Ephrem *Prose Refutations* 2 pp. 214.24–215.12; 223.23–224.7; also the whole passage 214.46–220.34). It is not to be excluded, but I rather deem it probable, that Bardaisan was also reminded of a doctrine of Plato in his *Timaeus*, a work by which, as I have argued,<sup>48</sup> Bardaisan was deeply inspired. I mean the doctrine that each element has specific qualities, which in turn are determined by the "mathematic entities." The latter are realities that are ontologically intermediate between the noetic sphere of the Ideas and the sense-perceptible plane. If we are to believe Ephrem, Bardaisan joined with atomism his penchant for Middle Platonism. Of course, his adherence to atomism does not mean that he refuses the Christian ideas of God as the creator of the cosmos and of divine providence. His faith in divine providence is clearly expressed especially at the end of the *Book of the Laws of Countries*, a Platonic dialogue stemming from his school but reflecting his own ideas,<sup>49</sup> in which one of the very first attestations of the doctrine of apokatastasis is also found.<sup>50</sup> As for

Bardaisan's notion of creation, this is essentially conceived as an ordination of the preexistent "beings" on the part of God's Logos, who intervened when the "beings," assaulted by darkness, asked God for help. This account is found in the so-called "cosmological traditions."<sup>51</sup> One detail therein may betray, I think, the Epicurean notion of "chance" in the atomic movement: it is found in Bardaisan's description of the primordial accident which disrupted the original order of the "beings" and had darkness mingle with them. This fact is said to have happened "either by chance or by an event." For instance, Moses Bar Kepha, one representative of the so-called "first cosmological tradition,"<sup>52</sup> reports as follows:

*Chapter 14. Against those who maintain that this world was constituted from the mixture of the five elements.* Bardaisan thought as follows concerning this world, and has told that it came into existence and was constituted on the basis of five beings, that is, Fire, Wind, Water, Light, and darkness. Each of them was located in its own place: the Light to the East, the Wind to the West, the Fire to the South, and the Water to the North. Their Lord was in the heights and their enemy—that is, darkness—in the abyss. But at a certain moment—I quote—either by chance or for an event, they crashed into one another/assaulted one another. And darkness had the impetus to ascend, in order to mix with those and among those; then, those pure beings began to be disturbed and to flee before darkness. And they sought refuge in the Most High's mercy, that he might liberate them from the sinister color that had mixed with them, that is, from darkness.

Then—I quote—when this tumult resounded, the Word of Thought [sc. the Logos] of the Most High, who is Christ, descended, and separated that darkness from the pure beings, and darkness was expelled and fell into the abyss, which becomes its nature. He gave each being its own region, in order, according to the Mystery of the Cross. And from the mixture of these beings and their enemy, darkness, he constituted this world.

The introduction of the notion of "chance" for the initial incident is confirmed by other cosmological traditions as well, in particular by Barḥadbshabba. He also belongs to the so-called "first cosmological tradition," and in his testimony "chance" or "accident" is posited as the sole possibility of explanation of the original incident, and this is even repeated twice. Here is the most relevant part of his account:

The fifth heresy is that of the Daiṣanites. They speak of many beings, and—I quote—the Lord and head of all them has made itself knowable to no one. And they call the elements, too, "beings." And they speak as follows: The world—I quote—originated from *an accident*. How? In the beginning—I quote—Light was in the East, and the Wind—I quote—was opposite to it, in the West; Fire was in the South, and Water opposite to it, in the North. Their Lord was on high, and the enemy, that is, darkness, in the depths. And because of an *accident*—I quote—the "beings" set themselves in motion. One of them—I quote—began to move and reached that which was beside it, and the power that each of them individually



possessed was thus reduced. The heavy descended and the light ascended, and they mingled with one another. And then all of them were upset, began to flee, and sought refuge in the Most High's mercy. Then a strong voice descended to the noise of that movement, that is, the Logos, the Word of Thought. It separated darkness from the pure beings, and the former was chased away and fell into its place down there, below. And the Logos separated them and placed each of them, by itself, in its region, according to the Mystery of the Cross. And from their mixture it built up this world.

Both accounts perfectly converge in attesting this concept of “chance” in Bardaisan’s cosmology, which, along with his atomism, may represent a point of convergence between Bardaisan’s thought and Epicureanism. Interestingly, while in the *testimonia* there is evidence of Bardaisan’s polemics against “heretics” such as Marcionites and Gnostics, there is no evidence of any polemic of his against *Epicureanism*, even though Bardaisan (like Origen) did criticize atheism, especially at the beginning of the *Book of the Laws of Countries*, and did not posit pleasure, of any kind, as an ethical ideal.<sup>53</sup>

Clement of Alexandria, who might have been a disciple of Bardaisan,<sup>54</sup> and who certainly knew Philo of Alexandria’s criticism of Epicureanism, shows a relatively profound and direct knowledge of Epicurean doctrines, although he does not seem to have embraced any of them, as Bardaisan appears to have done. Indeed, he seems to have read Epicurus himself. For instance, he quotes—and with approval, saying that it was well written (καλῶς)—a large excerpt from Epicurus’s *Letter to Menoeceus* in *Strom.* 4.8.69.2. In very close times, the whole text of this letter was available to, and cited by, Diogenes Laertius, who devoted a whole book, the last of his masterpiece, to Epicureanism, and entered a lively debate that involved his contemporary Christians as well, concerning the origin of philosophy and the value of barbarian “philosophy.”<sup>55</sup> In *Strom.* 6.2 Clement also preserves significant thoughts of Epicurus, which were incorporated in Usener’s collection as fr. 519 and 476: “*Ataraxia* is the most important fruit of justice” and “self-sufficiency is the greatest richness of all.” Clement also quotes *KD* 1 in *Strom.* 6.104.3, the same one that, along with other Epicurean statements, probably inspired Paul’s Epicurean allusion in the Areopagus speech, as I have suggested above. Moreover, Clement ascribes to Epicurus the definition of faith—clearly a core notion for a Christian author<sup>56</sup>—as a pre-notion, a *πρόληψις τῆς διανοίας*, in *Strom.* 2.4: this too is picked up by Usener as fr. 255. On the other hand, it is not alien to Clement



to take up the stereotype of Epicurus “the atheist,” which was already current in “pagan” authors themselves. Thus, he characterizes Epicurus as the initiator of atheism in *Strom.* 1.1.2. Clement’s criticism of Epicurus in *Strom.* 1.11.50.6 opposes Epicureanism to the other Greek philosophies and focuses on two points: hedonism, which Clement presents in the hyperbolical terms of “deification of pleasure,” and the denial of divine providence,<sup>57</sup> which is also criticized by him in *Protr.* 66.5. Indeed, these themes, along with the denial of the immortality of the soul, will be the most common anti-Christian accusations against Epicureanism.

In line with his own apologetic scheme according to which Greek philosophers were inspired by the Logos and even by Scripture, which they misunderstood at times, Clement in *Strom.* 5.14 suggests that Epicurus derived his doctrine of chance (*τοῦ αὐτομάτου*)—the one that seems to have been partially taken over by Bardaisan—from the sentence of Ecclesiastes, “vanity of vanities, all things are vanity.” Indeed, Clement does not exclude, but explicitly includes Epicureanism (along with Platonism, Stoicism, and Aristotelianism) among the Greek philosophical movements that were inspired by the Logos and therefore said “good things” (*ὅσα ἐῖρηται καλῶς*), teaching justice with pious science (*δικαιοσύνην μετὰ εὐσεβοῦς ἐπιστήμης ἐκδιδάσκοντα*, *Strom.* 1.7.37.6). Thus, Clement not only can praise Epicurus’s *Letter to Menoeceus* for its initial exhortation to philosophy extended to all in *Strom.* 4.8.69.2, but also quotes and praises Metrodorus’s fragment (Koerte 37) saying that it was divinely inspired (*ἐνθέως*, *Strom.* 5.138.2). And he greatly availed himself of Epicurean polemic against traditional “pagan” religion for his own refutation of the latter, especially in *Protr.* 2.30–32, which heavily depends, directly or indirectly, on Philodemus’s *On Piety*, moreover with the very same quotation from Euripides (*Alc.* 3) in both Clement and Philodemus. Besides distinguishing the theology of philosophers from that of mythographers and poets, which is also done by other Christian polemicists, Clement here uses the same double argument as Philodemus had employed against the gods of the poets: they are temporal and pass away, and they have unworthy passions and commit unworthy deeds. The catalog of the latter is, again, the same as Philodemus’s: woundings, bindings, enslavement, and fights for power, besides unlawful couplings. Clement’s doctrine of the “seminal Logos” that inspired Greek philosophers, including the Epicureans, and at

the same time his relatively good acquaintance with Epicurean texts, allowed his appreciation of several aspects of Epicureanism.

A contemporary of Clement, Tertullian, is one of the first Christian Latin authors who cites Epicurus. In the West, knowledge of Epicureanism was generally mediated by Lucretius and Cicero (and in part by Seneca as well). Indeed, Tertullian was familiar with Lucretius, besides availing himself of doxographical materials. His fundamental reproach to Epicurus is that his denial of divine Providence and his casualism plunge the whole world into utter chaos (*De an.* 46.2). Like Irenaeus, Tertullian too links Christian heresies, in this case Marcionism, with Epicureanism, again mainly because of the denial of divine providence (*C. Marc.* 1.25.3–5, 5.19.7).

Origen scores more than sixty occurrences of the name of Epicurus in his extant work, vs. over 160 mentions of Plato, but in an extremely unbalanced way: almost all of these come from his *Contra Celsum*; a few from the *Philocalia*, and only one from his homilies (*Hom. in Lev.* 8.9, with the negative, stereotyped characterization of Epicurus as a hedonist who identified pleasure with the highest good and was therefore an impure person). In *Contra Celsum*, in which he confronts “pagan” philosophy and criticism of the Bible, Origen criticizes Epicurean theology from the viewpoint of its atomistic structure (4.14). In particular, he argues that the atomic composition of the divinities precludes their eternity, since they are compounds, while only what is simple can be eternal (this is also why Origen upheld God’s absolute simplicity and unity, ἀπλῶς ἔν).<sup>58</sup> Compounds, on the contrary, come from aggregation and are necessarily subject to disaggregation. From this perspective, Origen blames Epicurus’s thesis that the deities must constantly defend themselves from destructive factors. It is to be noticed that Bardaisan, who, as mentioned above, seems to have embraced atomism, did not apply it to God; his was a “Christian atomism.”

Origen’s criticism of Epicurus is consistent with his exclusion of atheistic philosophers from his teaching in Caesarea, attested by his disciple Gregory Thaumaturgus, especially if one considers that Origen included among the “atheists” those who denied divine providence (“Those who claim that God or providence do not exist”: Greg. Thaum. *Or. paneg.* 13; cf. Orig. *De or.* 5.1; CC 8.38), while he taught his disciples all other philosophical currents.<sup>59</sup> In the same way, Bardaisan in his school in Edessa refused to teach atheists (as he says at the beginning of the *Book of the*

*Laws of Countries*). Another possible reason for Origen's exclusion of Epicureanism from his interest and teaching is that Epicurus rejected the encyclopedic disciplines as useless for philosophy, whereas Origen integrated them in his program as preparatory: philosophy crowned the encyclopedic disciplines, and in turn theology crowned philosophy. Marksches is probably right that Origen's knowledge of Epicurean doctrines—unlike Clement's and Philo's, as it seems—came, not from extensive and direct reading of Epicurus's works and other Epicurean texts, but from Stoic and Platonic lexica and handbooks with doxographical material.<sup>60</sup> I do not think this was because of a lack of sources, since these were available to Clement in Alexandria, but rather because of a lack of interest. Origen was relatively uninterested in, and critical of, “atheistic” philosophies.

When Origen represented Celsus, the author of the anti-Christian *True Discourse* or *True Logos*, as an Epicurean (CC 1.2 and *passim*), while he was a “Middle Platonist,”<sup>61</sup> he may have simply mistaken “his” Celsus for an Epicurean namesake who lived under Hadrian (CC 1.8),<sup>62</sup> or better he may have purported to identify him thusly for the sake of polemic. Eusebius, who ascribed the *True Discourse* to “Celsus the Epicurean” in *HE* 6.36.2, followed Origen, whether or not he understood his strategy. Origen is well aware, and even states (CC 1.8; 5.3), that Celsus never professes himself an Epicurean in his *True Discourse*; however, he says he read other writings of Celsus, and from these his Epicurean belief is clearer (CC 1.8). Of course, we cannot know with certainty, but those “other writings” may have been by another Celsus, really an Epicurean. On the other hand, some ideas that are close to Epicureanism can be detected in the *True Discourse*, especially a reference to the *κενὰ ἑλπίδες*, “empty hopes” for immortality and life in the beyond (CC 3.80), which sounds indeed closer to the Epicurean than to the Platonic, or “Middle Platonic”, view. This is one reason why Origen deems Celsus an Epicurean, also conflating this assertion of his with his criticism of the Gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus (even though this, i.e. the denial of the resurrection of the body, certainly fits a “pagan” Platonist, unlike the denial of life in the beyond). For Origen, Celsus is an Epicurean also due to his denial of divine providence (cf. CC 1.21, 2.13); indeed, in CC 1.10 and 1.13 Origen attacks the Epicureans for their rejection of divine providence, as elsewhere. In fact, Celsus did not deny providence, and Origen was well aware that

Celsus upheld Platonic doctrines such as divine providence and God's transcendence (CC 1.8, 4.54, 4.83), and that Celsus admired Plato (CC 6.18, 47) and referred to Plato throughout as an authority, but Origen, in order to construe him as an Epicurean, claims that Celsus *pretended* to admit divine providence, while he actually did not (CC 4.4). Indeed, Origen realizes that Celsus is a Platonist, but he does not want to concede this, and rather maintains that Celsus "in many respects wishes or *pretends* to be a Platonist" (ἐν πολλοῖς Πλατωνίζειν θέλει, CC 4.83). In this connection, Origen puts forward three hypotheses: "Either Celsus is dissimulating his Epicurean view, or ... he has changed his opinion for a better one, or ... he is but a homonym of the Epicurean philosopher," that is, he was indeed a Platonist (CC 4.54). The "better opinion" was of course Platonism, for which Celsus changed his old Epicurean belief on one of Origen's hypotheses. If Origen was so reluctant to concede that Celsus, who taught so many Platonic tenets, was a Platonist (which he finally admits only hypothetically in CC 4.54), it is because, I suspect, Origen—a Platonist himself, committed to the creation of a Christian Platonism, and possibly even the Neoplatonist of whom Porphyry in *VP* and later Neoplatonic sources speak<sup>63</sup>—was much more at ease criticizing an "Epicurean" than criticizing a Platonist. It was much easier and more congenial to Origen to refute an Epicurean, represented as a false Platonist, than a true Platonist. Because for Origen Christian Platonism was legitimate Platonism, and Platonism was the true philosophy: Origen stated squarely that "Plato was right" (*Cels.* 2.12). Indeed, when he criticizes Greek philosophical doctrines in *Comm. in Rom.* 3.1.197–215 Origen cites some that he says are deceptive and contrary to the truth. Now, these are all Peripatetic and Stoic doctrines, but not *Platonic*. One Platonic doctrine is in fact rejected by Origen in all of his production: metempsychosis, which, however, was expounded by Plato himself only in a mythical, and not in a theoretical, form, as instead later Platonists presented it. Origen's Platonism, thus, and the demands of polemical rhetoric, help explain his obstinate characterization of his adversary as "Epicurean," even if he himself was after all aware that Celsus was rather a Platonist.

A personal disciple (according to Eusebius *HE* 6.24.9 and Jerome VI 69.1) and faithful follower of Origen, the learned Dionysius of Alexandria, in the third century composed a treatise which has the same title as Epicurus's masterpiece *On Nature*: *Περὶ φύσεως*. This choice was

probably not casual, since Dionysius's treatise was precisely devoted to the refutation of Epicurean atomism and denial of divine providence—two points that, as I mentioned, were already in the focus of Origen's criticism. For his refutation Dionysius used Stoic doctrines. His work is lost, but Eusebius offers information on it and preserves fragments from it (*PE* 14.26–27); shortly afterwards, the Cappadocian Fathers, too, seem to have relied on Dionysius's treatise, besides other sources. Eusebius himself, for all the information he offered on Epicureanism, especially in his *Praeparatio Evangelica*, depended on a number of sources: not only Christian authors, such as Dionysius and Clement, but also treatises, such as that of Atticus, besides doxographical compendia. It is to be remarked, however, that in Dionysius's treatise there are no direct quotations from Epicurus; two come from Democritus. According to Christoph Marksches, Dionysius too, like Origen, did not read the whole works of Epicurus and the Epicureans, but more probably used handbooks.<sup>64</sup>

The Epicurean denial of providence was also criticized by Hilary of Poitiers, since in his view it was tantamount to denying God's very power: the Epicureans "take away from God his care, his providence, his discretion, his power" (*adimenter Deo curam, providentiam, arbitrium, potestatem*; in *Ps.* 119.10). For Hilary, the Epicureans' denial of divine providence goes along with their denial of the future judgment, as a way of giving tranquility to a conscience tormented by sins (*In Ps.* 144.4):

Those who want to believe that they will have a king over them are few. For many people prefer to deny that God concerns himself with human deeds, or they do not want to admit that God's judgment is established for the good and for the evil, and therefore they invent the theory of the elimination of both soul and body, in order to console their conscience, oppressed by the remorse of their impious deeds.<sup>65</sup>

Arnobius and especially Lactantius based themselves on Lucretius as a source of information on Epicurean philosophy, for their own refutations, but also as a source of inspiration for their own criticism of traditional "pagan" religion. In 1.39, in particular, Arnobius was certainly inspired by Lucretius in his derision of the veneration of statues and pictures of deities. Lactantius is more explicit than Arnobius in making clear that Lucretius is his source for his polemic against traditional pagan cult, also with verbal quotations of his verses (*Inst.* 2.3.10). Lactantius's refutation of Epicurean doctrines seems to have been the most articulated in Patristic literature,

including, for instance, a criticism of the Epicurean doctrine of the origin of humanity and of society, and a refutation of the notion of the human being as a creature of a hostile nature (*Inst.* 2.11 and 6.10; *Opificio Dei* 3). Unlike Arnobius, Lactantius often cited and echoed Lucretius, especially in his *Institutiones*; he was also acquainted with Cicero's transmission of Epicurean doctrines. For instance, his remark that Epicurus's doctrine subverted religion, in *De ira Dei* 8.1 (*dissolvitur autem religio, si credamus Epicuro*), in reference to the Epicurean tenet of the absence of divine providence, exactly reflects Cicero's observation in *ND* 1.3:

There are, and there were, philosophers who think that the gods do not concern themselves in the least with human things. Now, if their opinion is true, what piety, holiness, and religion there can ever exist?<sup>66</sup>

For his denial of divine providence, Lactantius contrasts Epicurus with all other philosophers, from the Presocratics to Plato, accusing him of denying what is evident (*Inst.* 2.8.49). This is an argument that was already used by Plutarch, *Adv. Col.* 1122f–1123a.<sup>67</sup> Lactantius also suggests that Epicurus refused to admit of the immortality of the soul because he hoped for impunity for himself, since—according to a widespread stereotype dependent on a misunderstanding of Epicurus's doctrine of pleasure—he was a dissolute: “But perhaps he promised impunity for his own vices; for he was an assertor of the most shameful pleasure” (*Inst.* 3.17.35).<sup>68</sup> This, which reminds one of Hilary's above-mentioned remark about the Epicureans' purportedly “impious deeds,” betrays not only a misrepresentation of Epicurus's hedonism, which moreover had katastematic pleasure at its top,<sup>69</sup> but also the interpretation of Epicurus himself as a dissolute, and not only as a theorizer of dissolute pleasures.

However, beyond his rhetorical emphasis and distortion, Lactantius was also aware that Epicurus was a supporter of frugality: “One who is even excessively frugal learns [sc. from Epicurus] that life can be sustained by just water and polenta” (*qui nimium parvus est discit [ab Epicuro] aqua et polenta vitam posse tolerari*; *Inst.* 3.17.5, included in Usener's collection as fr. 467). Also, Lactantius praises Epicurus and the Stoics for giving to anyone, independently of their gender, social or juridical status, or age, the possibility of studying philosophy (*Inst.* 3.25).<sup>70</sup> Lactantius is also the only source that ascribes to Epicurus a famous argument related to theodicy



(Usener 374, from *De ira Dei* 13.19), which Epicurus may have used in order to deny divine providence and support the perfect *ataraxia* of the divinity. Here is the argument: if God wants to eliminate evil but he cannot, he is impotent; if he can but does not, he is hostile; if he neither can nor wants, he is both impotent and malign. The only alternative fitting the dignity of God is that he both wants to and can, but in this case, what is the origin of evil, why does God not eliminate it? Epicurus's own answer is that the gods do not care for human vicissitudes, in order to preserve their imperturbability. There is even one case in which Lactantius prefers Epicurus's (and Democritus's) view to that of Plato and other philosophers: when Epicurus contests the eternity of the world (*Inst.* 7.1.10).

Ambrose is the only one among the Latin Fathers in his time who shows a knowledge of Epicurus that is based not only on the usual Latin sources, such as Lucretius, Cicero, and Seneca, but also on others, including Greek sources. In *Ep.* 63, stemming from 396 CE, he mentions "epitomes" of Philodemus in connection with Epicurus: "As Philodemus, a follower of his [sc. Epicurus], argues in his epitomes" (*sicut Philodemus eius sectator in epitomis suis disputat*). Soon after, Ambrose in the same letter quotes twice from Epicurus *Ep. Men.* 132 and 130, but indicating Hermarchus as his source:

[Epicurus,] as Hermarchus says, claims that what makes life pleasant is not drinking, eating, producing children, having intercourse with women, or having a great deal of fish or other things of this kind that are prepared for the enjoyment of luxurious convivial occasions, but it is sober reasoning.<sup>71</sup>

It is probable that Ambrose was translating from Greek, which he knew well (thus, for instance, he could read Origen's original Greek texts as well, whereas an Augustine had to rely on Latin translations). Indeed, Hermarchus probably quoted passages from Epicurus's letters. Ambrose might depend on Origen for these quotations, as in so much else; however, in Origen's extant Greek works there is no mention of either Hermarchus or Philodemus. So much is lost of Origen's work that an *argumentum ex silentio* cannot be brought forward and a *non liquet* is more prudent. Clement of Alexandria might be a candidate, as he quotes Philodemus. Ambrose, who is likely to have been acquainted with a Middle and Neoplatonic reception of Epicurus, underlines that the latter was already the object of sharp criticism on the part of Greek philosophers for his



hedonistic ethics (*Ep.* 63–69; *Off.* 1.13). Indeed, this polemic was old in philosophy, but still more recently Plotinus, with whose work Ambrose was well acquainted, even accused Epicureanism and Gnosticism of the same basic theoretical faults, essentially a ridiculing of providence and virtue (*Enn.* 2.9.15). Plotinus’s critique of Epicureanism parallels that of Origen.<sup>72</sup> Plotinus had available to him not only doxographical reports on Epicurus and Epicureanism, but texts of Epicurus himself. It seems that in Athens and in Alexandria, and perhaps elsewhere, Epicureanism still flourished during Plotinus’s career.<sup>73</sup> Now, sources on Epicureanism were available also to Clement and Origen. The only passage in the *Enneads*, in which Plotinus explicitly mentions Epicurus, is 2.9.[33.]15, containing Plotinus’s arguments against Epicurus’ rejection of providence. According to Plotinus, the principal consequence of Epicurus’s error resides in his hedonism, since, without divine providence, hedonism cannot be resisted (the same argument will be put forward by Gregory of Nyssa, a knower of both Plotinus and Origen, on whom more soon: if there is no divine providence which is manifest here and especially in life after death, then virtue will not prevail over hedonism, *De An.* 17-20). Likewise, Origen rejected both Epicurean hedonism and Epicurean denial of providence. Finally, Ambrose, like many other Patristic authors, sometimes uses “Epicurean” as a synonym of “hedonist” and even a term of abuse, in reference to opponents who countered asceticism (*Ep.* 63.8).

Another close follower of Origen who (like Dionysius) refuted Epicurean theses is Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>74</sup> In *De an.* 20–25, a dialogue that is the Christian remake of Plato’s *Phaedo*,<sup>75</sup> he is going to demonstrate the soul’s spiritual nature and its permanence after death. This is in fact a refutation of Stoic and especially Epicurean materialistic objections to the thesis of the immortality of the soul:

“Could not those who argue for the opposite claim that the body, being a compound, is completely dissolved into its constitutive elements? ... all that which is composite is necessarily also subject to dissolution, and dissolution is the destruction of the compound. Now, what is destroyed is not immortal.” ... And my Teacher [sc. Macrina, sister and teacher of Gregory of Nyssa], after sighing a little on what I had said, remarked: “These considerations, and others similar to these, were probably opposed to the Apostle by the Stoics and the Epicureans who once gathered in Athens. Indeed, I hear say that above all Epicurus was led by his suppositions to a theory according to which the nature of things was considered to be casual and operating by itself, as though no providence permeated the realities.

“This is also why he regarded human life as a bubble, as though our body were swollen and kept in tension, in every point, by a certain breeze, as long as this breeze remains contained by what surrounds it: at the moment of the disaggregation of the corporeal mass, the breeze kept inside, too, would be extinguished along with it. For, according to this philosopher, the boundary of nature was what appears, the phenomenon. He made sense-perception the measure of the apprehension of all, because the sense organs of his soul were completely closed, and he was unable to turn his sight to any of the intelligible and incorporeal realities, like one who, being shut in a small room, remains deprived of the wonderful spectacle of the sky, in that the walls and the ceiling prevent him from seeing what is outside. Indeed, all the sense-perceptible objects that are perceived in the universe are really a kind of walls of earth, which, being in between, impede the contemplation of intelligible realities to those who are endowed with a spirit that is too scarcely elevated. Such a man limits himself to seeing earth, water, air, and fire, but, due to the insufficient loftiness of his spirit, is unable to discern the provenance of each of these elements, in what each is contained, or by what it is governed. And yet a person, seeing a garment, is led by reasoning to postulate its weaver; thanks to the ship, one can have an intuition of the existence of its builder, and, at the same time as the perception of the architectonic building takes place, the idea of the hand of its builder is formed in the mind of those who observe it. But these people, looking at the world, are unable to see the One who is made manifest through it.”

This is why those who in their doctrines teach the disappearance of the soul put forward the following wise and bright theories: that the body is composed of elements; that the elements are corporeal; that the soul cannot subsist by itself unless it either is one of these elements or dwells in them. Indeed, if our adversaries maintain that the soul is found in no place simply because it does not have the same nature as the elements, these people should first of all teach in their doctrines that life in the flesh is inanimate as well. For the body is nothing but a concourse of elements. Therefore, they should not say, either, that the soul is found in these in order to vivify the compound thanks to itself, if it is the case that, after this, it is not possible, as they believe, that the soul can subsist, too, in that the elements continue to subsist. In this way, they end up demonstrating nothing else than that our life is dead. Now, if they do not doubt that the soul dwells in the body, how can they teach the doctrine of its dissolution into the elements?

Then let them dare maintain similar theses even regarding the divine nature! For how could they ever claim that this nature, intelligible, immaterial, and invisible, which penetrates both humid and soft substances and hot and hard ones, keeps the existing realities in cohesion in being, without having the same nature as the things in which it dwells, and without being able to consist in them because of the difference of nature? Therefore, let the divinity itself, which has all beings subsist, be eliminated from their doctrines ... . It would be more proper to keep our silence before such statements, and not even respond to theses that are foolish and impious, since also a divine saying forbids to reply to the fool according to his foolishness. For, according to the Prophet, the man who “claims that God does not exist” is utterly “foolish.”<sup>76</sup>

Epicurus is the prototype of the “materialist” who is closed to the divine and to the transcendent dimension. Even the topic of Epicurus’s “madness” is present in this picture, along with the denunciation of his denial of divine providence, his casualism, and the concept of the divine as corporeal, which is declared to be tantamount to atheism.

Gregory's older brother, Basil, who never cites Epicurus by name in his *œuvre*, nevertheless knew his ideas at the very least at the level of handbooks, if not even somewhat better. Besides knowing Dionysius of Alexandria's treatise, Basil may have read passages from Epicurus more directly, and sometimes quotes or echoes them. One passage is quoted at the beginning of his *Ep.* 11 from a letter of Epicurus, on the point of death, to Idomeneus (*ap.* DL 10.22). In *Ep.* 9.4 Basil seems to echo Epicurus's motto, *λάθε βιώσας*, "live hidden," in his own words: *καὶ ἅμα τῷ λαθεῖν βιώσαντες*. A probable reminiscence of Epicurus is also found in Basil's *On Envy* 5; when he states that virtuous people do not deserve to be envied and vicious people would rather deserve to be pitied, he seems to be reminiscent of Epicurus's thought, as expressed in VS 53, which analogously remarks that the virtuous do not deserve to be envied (and adds that the vicious, the luckier and more prosperous they are, ruin themselves the more). Epicurean sentences, indeed, were received in Christian florilegia, such as that of Nilus in *PG* 79. Nilus is even likely to have handed down in the original Greek a sentence of Epicurus (*ἀρχὴ σωτηρίας ἡ ἑαυτοῦ κατάγνωσις*, "the beginning of salvation is self-accusation") that was known to Usener only through Seneca's Latin translation in *Ep.* 28.9 (*initium est salutis notitia peccati*) and was included in his collection as fr. 522.

Gregory Nazianzen, the third great Cappadocian and a close friend of Basil, with whom he studied philosophy and rhetoric in Athens, shows appreciation—remarkably rare in early Christian authors—of both Epicurus's life, which he describes as characterized by self-restraint (*κοσμίως καὶ σωφρόνως ἔζην*) and not by self-indulgence, and his notion of pleasure, which is depicted as sober and as a prize for one's labors: *ἄθλον τῶν ἐμοὶ πονουμένων* (*Carm.* 1.2.10). Gregory further emphasizes the coherence between Epicurus's life and his philosophy (*βοηθῶν ἐκ τρόπου τῷ δόγματι*, "confirming his doctrine by means of his own way of life"). At other times, however, depending on his rhetorical necessities, Gregory returns to more stereotypical criticism of Epicurus's hedonism, atomism, and supposed atheism (*Or.* 27.10, 4.72).

Rufinus, the translator of Eusebius and Origen, also translated into Latin the so-called Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* (*Ἀναγνωρισμοί*, *Recognitions*), which, besides incorporating passages from Bardaisan, in 8.16–19, include an argument against Epicurean atomism:

if it is so clear that God is the creator of the world, what opportunity will Epicurus have to introduce his atoms and to claim that not only sense-perceptible bodies, but also intellectual and rational spirits derive from tiny corporeal particles, impossible to perceive by one's senses? But you will say, according to Epicurus's opinion, that solid bodies are formed by an uninterrupted flow of atoms that continually arrive and mix with one another over enormous stretches of time without end, and constitute an aggregate.<sup>77</sup>

The Syrian author of the *Recognitiones* may have intended to counter contemporary thinkers, more than he countered Epicurus himself; I have already observed that Bardaisan seems to have embraced a form of atomism, and the author of the *Recognitiones* probably knew this. However, Bardaisan does not seem to have given an atomistic account of God, as I pointed out earlier.

For Jerome, a contemporary of Rufinus and first a close friend of his, then his worst enemy because of the Origenistic controversy, Epicurus is the stereotype of hedonism and his follower is a man who is immersed in sins and denies the immortality of the soul, thus adding blasphemy to sins (*In Is.* 7.22.12). This is why Jerome calls Jovinian, an opponent of asceticism, "Epicurean" (*C. Iov.* 1.1). Jerome contrasted Pythagoras's continence with Epicurus's purported self-indulgence (*C. Iov.* 2.38), and repeats two of the classic anti-Epicurean charges: abolition of divine providence and hedonistic ethics: "Epicurus claims that providence does not exist and that pleasure is the supreme good."<sup>78</sup> Jerome too, however, like Lactantius, was aware that Epicurus in fact preached frugality rather than unbridled pleasure, so that "he filled all of his books with vegetables and fruit, and maintains that one must live on simple foods" (*C. Iovin.* 2.11). Like Tertullian, Jerome too associates Marcionism and Epicureanism in the same passage in *In Is.* 7.9, saying that Marcionites and Gnostics, who disparage the Old Testament, are much worse than Epicurus, because, while accepting providence, they criticize the Creator. Both Jerome and Augustine give voice to the old stereotype—already widespread in "pagan" authors because of Epicurus's denial of the importance of the encyclopedic disciplines—of Epicurus as ignorant and Epicureanism as a philosophy for the ignorant: *qui cum Epicuro litteras non didicerunt*, "those who, with Epicurus, did not even learn literature/the alphabet" (Jerome *Ep.* 70.6); *Epicurei apud indoctam multitudinem . . . vixerunt*, "Epicureans prospered among ignorant common people" (Augustine *Ep.* 118.14). And both of them, unlike Ambrose, seem to depend on the usual Latin sources for their

knowledge of Epicureanism, although, while Augustine was almost unacquainted with Greek—which heavily affected his exegesis and theological views<sup>79</sup>—Jerome mastered it, like Ambrose himself. Therefore, it is not surprising that even in *Ep.* 118 to Dioscorus, in which he ventures into an in-depth discussion of Epicureanism, it seems impossible to demonstrate that Augustine went beyond Cicero as a source. In *Conf.* 6.16, then, Epicurus is evoked only in a general sense, as a hedonist.

More interestingly, Augustine in 410 CE testifies to the disappearance of at least many primary sources for Epicureanism (*Ep.* 118.21):

We clearly see that by our day they [sc. the Epicureans] have definitely ceased to speak, to the point that by now their doctrines are mentioned practically only in the schools of rhetoric, and even there rarely.<sup>80</sup>

Augustine for his part rejoiced in this disappearance, which meant less objections to Christianity from the Epicurean side (*Ep.* 118.12). Indeed, it is significant that in his rereading of the key episode of Paul's discourse in Athens at the beginning of *Sermo* 150, Augustine sees an opposition between Paul on the one side and Epicureans and Stoics on the other, rather than a conciliation, and states that this passage of Acts should teach the Christians which side to choose and which to reject, while some Christians, Augustine remarks, are in fact "Epicureans." It is also to be noticed that in the passage I have quoted from *Ep.* 118 Augustine does not say that Epicurean doctrines are remembered only in schools of *philosophy*, but he states that they are mentioned only in schools of *rhetoric*. This clearly points to a non-technical and rather popularized transmission of a few tenets of Epicureanism, clearly exposed to misinterpretation and distortion. The situation had not improved by the time of Isidore of Seville, who depended on Lucretius for his knowledge of Epicureanism, but on a second-hand Lucretius, arguably mediated by Servius and Lactantius.

Therefore, as a very general remark, it is possible to see how the fading away of the availability and use of good sources on Epicureanism, along with the disappearance of the Epicurean school itself, brought about a progressive impoverishment and hostility among Christian authors with respect to Epicurus and Epicureanism. A comparison between the representation of Epicureanism in Acts or Clement, or still in Gregory Nazianzen or Ambrose, on the one side, and, on the other, authors like

Jerome or even Isidore is telling. Not only did appreciation for at least some sides of Epicureanism—present in the author of Acts, in Clement, in Bardaisan, and in Nazianzen—disappear, but anti-Epicurean polemic even became more and more stereotyped, crass hedonism and atheism being its main focuses, with scarce grounds in Epicurean theory in both cases.

The distortions surrounding the charge of hedonism were still clear to Nazianzen; as for the falsity of the charge of atheism, which was alive already in pre-Christian philosophical debate, the certainly Hellenized author of Acts seems to me to have been well aware of it. This is why he cites the Epicureans first among the philosophers who were interested in Paul's theological discourse, and moreover had Paul try hard to adapt his Christian message not only to Stoic theology, with his quotation of Cleanthes/Aratus, but also to *Epicurean* theology, with his quotation from Epicurus's teaching that the divinity needs nothing from human beings, but rather the latter need it. Shortly after (supposing that Paul said so around 50 CE in Athens), or shortly before (supposing that the Areopagus speech is entirely due to the author of Acts, even if I personally deem this less probable), the same idea was expressed by Seneca, I suspect under the influence of Epicurean theology as well.

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<sup>1</sup> See Usener, *Epicurea*; translated and updated in Ramelli, *Epicurea*, in the edition of Hermann Usener and *Stoici romani minori*, chapter on Manilius, and review by Gretchen Reydam-Schils; see also Ramelli, "L'oeuvre d'Usener sur Épicure." In his *Index fontium* appended to Usener, *Epicurea*, 421–39, which is also translated and integrated in my edition, Usener himself indicated the Patristic passages that are useful as sources or *testimonia* on Epicurus and his doctrine.

<sup>2</sup> Schmid, "Epikur"; Erler, "Epikuros," 1138; Jungkuntz, "Christian Approval of Epicureanism" and "Fathers, Heretics, and Epicureans."

<sup>3</sup> DeWitt, *St. Paul and Epicurus*, who, however, counted as authentically Pauline disputed Pauline epistles such as Colossians and Ephesians; Hannah, *You Will Not Taste Death*.

<sup>4</sup> For a second-century dating, see at least Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, esp. 185–229; and Pervo, *Dating Acts and Acts: A Commentary*, who proposes a date around 115 CE. Alexander, "The Gospel According to Celsus" finds it difficult to suppose such a positive portrait of the relationship between Christianity and the Roman Empire under Trajan, and suggests a composition in the 90s of the first century in Rome, "in a large and self-confident Jewish community with a strong Jewish-Christian component." Traditional dates are 60–64 CE, on the basis of the absence of any mention of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE and of the death of Paul. For other recent works that are sensitive to the historical question in relation to Acts see, e.g., Black, *An Aramaic Approach*; Tyson, *Luke, Judaism, and the Scholars*; Heusler, *Kapitalprozesse im Lukanischen Doppelwerk*; Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian*; Penner and Vander Stichele, *Contextualizing Acts*; Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins*; and Bovon, *Luke the Theologian*.

<sup>5</sup> The silence of Acts on Platonists may well be due to the fact that the text actually reflects a historical encounter of Paul with Athenian philosophers around 50 CE. For at that time indeed Middle Platonism was not yet established in Athens. Ammonius of Alexandria, who was the teacher of Plutarch, had not yet arrived at Athens. See Ramelli, "Alle radici della filosofia patristica," 149–76 and "Philosophen und Prediger."

<sup>6</sup> So Lestang, "À la louange du dieu inconnu," 394–408.

<sup>7</sup> See Ramelli, "Bardesane e la sua scuola"; "Ethos and Logos."

<sup>8</sup> This is a foundational episode in Christian reception of classical culture. See Ramelli, “Dieu et la philosophie” and “Christianity and Classical Culture.”

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Martin, *Aratos, Phénomènes*, 2.144–46, with parallels to Homer and references to the notion of Zeus as father (on which see Ramelli, “Dio come padre nello Stoicismo romano,” 343–51 and “L’interpretazione allegorica filosofica di Zeus,” 155–80). Kidd, *Aratus, Phaenomena*, 72–73, 166 hypothesizes that Aratus in turn quoted Cleanthes’s *Hymn to Zeus* v. 4; see, however, Martin, *Aratos, Phénomènes*, 2.145 on the difficulties in the reconstruction of this verse. Pohlenz thought that Paul was quoting Aratus; Schwabl and Wilamowitz that he was quoting Cleanthes; see also Euripides *Hipp.* 450. Cf. Renahan, “Acts 17:28”; Zuntz, “Vers 4 des Kleanthes-Hymnus”; Giangrande, “Kleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus, line 4”; Appel, “Zur Interpretation des vierten Verses”; Ramelli, “Aspetti degli sviluppi”; Thom, “Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus.”

<sup>10</sup> So Edwards, “Quoting Aratus,” 268–69; v. 5 was already quoted in Hellenistic Judaism by Aristobulus fr. 4. Balch, “The Areopagus Speech,” 52–79 points out parallels with Posidonius.

<sup>11</sup> See Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body* and “Talking Their Way into Empire.”

<sup>12</sup> See analysis in Ramelli and Konstan, *Terms for Eternity*, 34–35.

<sup>13</sup> SV 2.599 = Eusebius *PE* 15.19.1–3: “The common *logos*, that is, the common nature, becomes more and more abundant and in the end dries everything out and resolves everything into itself ... returning to the first *logos* and to that famous ‘resurrection’ that completes the ‘great year,’ when ... universal apokatastasis takes place.” 2.625 = Nemesius *Nat. hom.* 38: “The Stoics maintain that the planets will return [ἀποκαθισταμένους] to the same constellation ... universal apokatastasis takes place, not only once, but many times, or more exactly the same things will keep returning [ἀποκαθίστασθαι] to the infinite, without end.” It must be observed that the terms ἀποκατάστασις and ἀποκαθίστημι are attested for the Stoics only by Christian sources. Marcus Aurelius (*Ad se ipsum* 11.1.3), Simplicius (*In Ph.* 886.12–13), and Alexander of Aphrodisias (*In Ar. Gen. et corr.* 314.13–15) have παλιγγενεσία and πάλιν γίγνομαι. However, καθίστημι is attested in a Greek fragment of Chrysippus on apokatastasis, preserved by Lactantius (*Inst.* 7.23 = SV 2.623): “It is evident that it is not at all impossible that we too, after death, once certain cycles of time [περίοδοι χρόνου] have elapsed, are restored/reconstituted [καταστήσασθαι] into the structure that we have now.” Translations in this essay are always mine. A systematic study of apokatastasis in ancient philosophy, down to late Neoplatonism, with Proclus and Damascius, is needed and in the works.

<sup>14</sup> On differences in the attestations see Barnes, “La doctrine du retour éternel,” 9–12; Long, “The Stoics on World-Conflagration and Everlasting Recurrence,” 26–31.

<sup>15</sup> Gourinat, “Éternel retour et temps périodique” admits that the Stoics were inspired by Heraclitus on this score, as was already postulated by Friedrich Nietzsche, but he considers the doctrine of the eternal return to be above all a Stoic doctrine. He sharply distinguishes the doctrine of Zeno, and Chrysippus’s modifications of it, aimed at making it less necessitarian; though, some Stoics did not profess it, such as Zeno of Tarsus and Diogenes of Babylonia, and especially Boethus and Panaetius. See also Gourinat, “Nietzsche et les Grecs”; and, on the Stoic apokatastasis depicted by Dio of Prusa, Ramelli, “Le origini della filosofia.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Pierris, *The Empedoclean Kosmos*; and Primavesi, “Empedocle: il problema” and *Empedokles Physika I*.

<sup>17</sup> See Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis and Tempo ed eternità*, introduction. For a contextualization in all of patristic philosophy: see “Time and Eternity.”

<sup>18</sup> P. J. Williams, *The New Testament in Its First-Century Setting*; Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 13–14.

<sup>19</sup> I do not list bibliography on Philo of Alexandria, as it would be endless. For the influence of Greek thought on Judaism at the time of Paul I just cite: Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, *The “Hellenisation” of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, and *Kleine Schriften*; Levine, *Judaism*



and Hellenism in Antiquity; Horst, *Hellenism, Judaism, Christianity*; and Hanhart, *Studien zur LXX und zum hellenistischen Judentum*.

<sup>20</sup> On Epicureanism in the imperial age, besides bibliography on Diogenes of Oenoanda, see Fornaro, “Dione Crisostomo, epicurei e Lucrezio”; Ferguson, “Epicureanism under the Roman Empire,” esp. 2275–77 for a comparison with Paul; Criscuolo, “Aspetti della polemica antiepicurea nel tardoantico,” with respect to Seneca, Numenius, and Clement of Alexandria.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Mutschmann, “Seneca und Epikur”; Sachelli, *Lineamenti epicurei nello Stoicismo di Seneca*; Marchesi, *Seneca*, 383–89; Schottlaender, “Epikureisches bei Seneca”; Campese, *Seneca e l’epicureismo*; Motto and Clark, “*Paradoxum Senecae*. The Epicurean Stoic”; André, “Sénèque et l’Épicurisme”; Lo Moro, “Seneca ed Epicuro”; Maso, “Il problema dell’Epicureismo nell’Ep. 33 di Seneca”; Bringmann, “Seneca’s Apokolokyntosis,” 885–88; Setaioli, *Seneca e I Greci*; Freise, “Die Bedeutung der Epikur-Zitate in den Schriften Senecas”; Mazzoli, “Le *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* di Seneca”; Rist, “Seneca and Stoic Orthodoxy”; Criscuolo, “Aspetti della polemica antiepicurea nel tardoantico,” 149–67; Gigante, “*Seneca in partibus Epicuri*,” “Conobbe Seneca l’opera di Filodemo?,” and “Seneca filosofo e le scuole di pensiero”; Ramelli, “*Nostra autem conversatio in caelis est*,” Schiesaro, “Seneca and Epicurus.”

<sup>22</sup> *Ep. Men.* 123; *Ep. Pyth.* 77; Usener 255, 352–66; Arrighetti fr. 175.

<sup>23</sup> On Epicurean theology I refer to Spinelli and Verde’s chapter in this volume and to the bibliographical references in Ramelli, “Alle radici della filosofia patristica.”

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Cic. *ND* 1.18.49; Hermarchus, Longo Auricchio fr. 32–33; Epicurus, Arrighetti fr. 19.1 and SV 24.

<sup>25</sup> Usener 353, on which see Kleve, “Die Urbewegung,” 87–90; cf. Arrighetti fr. 72.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Arrighetti fr. 194–95; Cic. *ND* 1.39.109; Epicurus, Usener 352; Usener 355 = Arrighetti fr. 257; Usener 357; Arrighetti fr. 39; Lucr. *DRN* 4.722–48. On mind in Epicureanism see Konstan and Verde, “Mind in the Epicurean Tradition.”

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Usener 352 = Arrighetti fr. 176; Merlan, “Zwei Fragen,” 196–217; Schmid, “Götter und Menschen in der Theologie Epikurs,” 133–40; Frassinetti, “Cicerone e gli dèi di Epicuro,” 113–32; Freymuth, “Eine Anwendung,” 101–15; Kleve, “Die Unvergänglichkeit”; Isnardi Parente, *Opere di Epicuro*, 32–33, 374 n. 1; Giannantoni, “Epicuro e l’ateismo antico,” 25–26. See also Usener 358 and Arrighetti fr. 179; and Demetr. Lac. *De diis*, De Falco col. 24.79–80.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Ep. Men.* 124; Arrighetti fr. 33. Arrighetti, *Epicuro. Opere*, 538–40 adduces Usener 361 = Arrighetti fr. 181–82. On the immortality of the divinities in Epicureanism, see Kleve, “Die Unvergänglichkeit,” 55–62; Swoboda, *Epicureae doctrinae*, 273–80; on the pre-notions of the divinities see also Kleve, “Die Urbewegung,” 25–30.

<sup>29</sup> See Arrighetti fr. 33 and 184; Bignone, *Epicuro*, 44 n. 7 and 45 n. 1; Arrighetti, *Epicuro. Opere*, 539–40; Isnardi Parente, *Opere di Epicuro*, 272 n. 1; also 46–47 on the imitation of the divinity on the part of the sage.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Usener 88 = Arrighetti fr. 28, which, along with Usener 41 (= Arrighetti fr. 19.5), is the only testimony of Book 13 of *On Nature*, in which, just as in Book 12 of the same work and the *Ep. Men.*, the relationship between the divinities and the human beings was treated.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Usener 374 (to be connected with Sextus Empiricus *P.* 3.9–11) and Arrighetti fr. 27.1, 28, 33, and 179; *Ep. Men.* 124; on the denial of providence, see Arrighetti fr. 178 and 180–82, Usener 364–83, and Lucr. *DRN* 2.167–83; 1090–1104; Cic. *ND* 1.20 and 1.54–55 with the notes of Isnardi Parente, *Opere di Epicuro*, 391–93; against divination and Stoic theodicy, see: Usener 395; Lucr. *DRN* 5.146–234; Epicurus, Arrighetti fr. 179; and Cic. *ND* 1.20.53–56.

<sup>32</sup> See Motta, *Il Contra Fatum di Gregorio di Nissa*, with my review; Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa*; “Origen, Bardaisan”; *Bardaisan on Human Nature, Fate, and Free Will*; “Bardaisan of

Edessa, Origen, and Imperial Philosophy”; “Bardaisan, Freewill, and Astrological Determinism” on Bardaisan, Origen, Diodore, and Gregory.

<sup>33</sup> On which see Obbink, “The Atheism of Epicurus.”

<sup>34</sup> DL 10.10, in which his *pietas erga deos* is exalted; Cic. *ND* 1.20.56; Philodemus in Usener 85 = Arrighetti fr. 135; Usener 142 = Arrighetti fr. 66; Usener 157 = Arrighetti fr. 86; Usener 169 = Arrighetti fr. 93; Usener 386–87 (on which see Capasso, *Margini ercolanesi*, 30); Nestle, *Griechische Religiosität*, 394–95; Bignone, *L’Aristotele perduto*, 2.369; Festugière, *Épicure et ses dieux*, 65–66 and 86–90; Des Places, *La religion grecque*, 262; Salem, *La mort n’est rien pour nous*, 42–55. Those are debated passages concerning Epicurean worship, along with fr. 8 col. 1 of *P.Herc.* 1232 of Philodemus, *On Epicurus* (omitted by Usener and Arrighetti, but partially included in Usener’s *Glossarium Epicureum*, s.v. *φύσις*), in the restitution provided by Tepedino, “Nuove letture del fr. 8.” It would be a banquet, not for the gods, but in memory of friends who had passed away and were heroized, according to Clay, “The Cults of Epicurus.” On the cultic aspect of the *Kepos*, with bibliography, see also Capasso, *Trattato etico epicureo*, 41–50. On the aforementioned passage from Philodemus, *On Epicurus* see also Bignone, *L’Aristotele perduto*, 1.558–65; for Tepedino, “Nuove letture del fr. 8,” 226, Philodemus is relating how Epicurus invited some disciples to a common banquet aimed at uniting friends in the recollection of deceased friends, whose life is a model for all: see Bignone, *L’Aristotele perduto*, 2.518, 559 n. 314; Clay, “Individual and Community,” 276–77.

<sup>35</sup> Apart from Usener 85–86, Usener 82–84 and 87, along with Arrighetti fr. 19.5 (= Usener 41) are our only sources of information concerning Book 12 of Epicurus’s *On Nature*. Its themes are celestial phenomena and the fact that the first human beings had concepts of incorruptible natures, plus the polemic with Prodicus, Diagoras, and Critias, considered to be atheists. This book may have dealt with the origin of civilization (cf. Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2.151); cf. Usener 84. For the probable union of theological and astronomical themes in this book, just as in the *Ep. Pyth.* and in a part of the *Ep. Hdt.*, see Steckel, “Epikuros,” 605; Arrighetti, *Epicuro. Opere*, 691–95, 728–29; Erler, “Epikur,” 98.

<sup>36</sup> See Reale, Ramelli, and Girgenti, *Diogene Laerzio*, with my commentary ad loc. (n. 382).

<sup>37</sup> See Giannantoni, “Epicuro e l’ateismo antico,” 42; also Giannantoni, “L’ateismo.”

<sup>38</sup> Just as mathematics, it was countered by Epicurus. See *On Nature* 11, and his *Ep. Pyth.* against univocal explanations of celestial phenomena; cf. Festugière, *Épicure et ses dieux*, 988–97, who also mentions (26–27 and 37) Menander, who was a fellow-ephebe of Epicurus. In his *Arbitratus* he has Onesimus express an Epicurean thought: to think that the gods take care of all people would mean to oppress them with an infinity of problems and to ascribe to them a life unworthy of the gods. See also Usener 84–85, from Epicurus *On Nature* 12, and Arrighetti fr. 27.1 from Philodemus: “the first human beings received concepts of incorruptible natures,” etc. On the connection of this passage with the denial that a relationship exists between the divinities and the laws that govern the movements of the heavenly bodies see Arrighetti, *Epicuro. Opere*, 707 and n. \* [sic]. Erler, “Epikur,” 98, following Usener, includes Arrighetti fr. 135 (= Usener 85) among those from Book 12 of Epicurus’s *On Nature* due to a thematic affinity: “möglichlicherweise ist wegen gleicher Thematik auch [135] Arr. mit Usener zu Buch 12 zu rechnen.” It treats of damages or salvation that can come to human beings from the divinity, on which see also *Ep. Men.* 124: “The greatest factors of damage are sent by the gods to the wicked, while the greatest factors of benefit are sent <to the good>.”

<sup>39</sup> See Ramelli, *Allegoria*, vol. 1, with the review by F. Ferrari; Ramelli, *Allegoristi dell’età classica*, “The Philosophical Stance of Allegory,” “Valuing Antiquity in Antiquity by Means of Allegoresis,” and “Allegorizing and Philosophizing.”

<sup>40</sup> The first *Key Doctrine* appears again in Lucr. *DRN* 1.44–49 = *KD* 2.646–51; cf. 6.58–79 and Cic. *ND* 1.17.75. Cf. *Ep. Men.* 123; *Ep. Hdt.* 76–77; Usener 13, 32, 33, 38–40, 183, 359, 360, 362–66, 368, 374, and 230; Arrighetti fr. 192–95; Demetr. Lac. *P.Herc.* 1055 col. 26 Renna (see Capasso,

*Margini ercolanesi*, 45). On the anthropomorphism of the deities according to Epicurus see Usener 353.

<sup>41</sup> *Deum colit qui novit: vetemus lintea et strigiles Iovi ferre et speculum tenere Iunoni: non quaerit ministros deus. Quidni? Ipse humano generi ministrat . . . primus est deorum cultus deos credere, dein reddere illis maiestatem suam, reddere bonitatem sine qua nulla maiestas est . . . satis illos coluit quisquis imitatus est.* See also Attridge, “Philosophical Critique of Religion,” 67–69; and Ramelli, “La concezione di Giove” and “*Sacer spiritus* in Seneca.”

<sup>42</sup> Notwithstanding his hostility to Judaism: see my “Seneca,” in *Encyclopedia of Second-Temple Judaism*, and “Seneca the Younger,” in *Encyclopaedia of Ancient History*.

<sup>43</sup> See Fürst et al., *Der apokryphe Briefwechsel*, with my review; Ramelli, “Aspetti linguistici dell’epistolario Seneca-Paolo,” “Diogene Laerzio e Clemente Alessandrino nel contesto,” “Gregory of Nyssa’s Exegesis,” “The Pseudepigraphic Correspondence between Seneca and Paul,” “Valuing Antiquity in Antiquity by Means of Allegoresis,” and “A Pseudepigraphon inside a Pseudepigraphon.”

<sup>44</sup> The very category of “Gnosticism” has been criticized by scholars, such as M. A. Williams, *Re-Thinking Gnosticism*; King, *What is Gnosticism?*, with my review; Marjanen, *Was There a Gnostic Religion?*; and Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, who builds upon Williams’s and King’s arguments and regards the term “Gnostic” as misleading in particular for Valentinianism, on which he focuses. Others, such as Pleše, “Gnostic Literature” or Weiß, *Frühes Christentum und Gnosis*, prefer to keep this category although they are aware of the complexity and diversity of Gnostic groups. See also Ramelli, “Gnosticism”; Denzey, *Introduction to “Gnosticism” and Cosmology and Fate*, who corrects Jonas’s description of “Gnosticism” as cosmologically pessimistic basing herself on the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Gospel of Judas*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and *Pistis Sophia*; Sabau, “Le modèle soteriologique.”

<sup>45</sup> See Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, 91–108 and *passim*; Eadem, *Bardaisan on Human Nature, Fate, and Free Will*.

<sup>46</sup> See Beck, “Bardaisan und seine Schule bei Ephräm,” 310–19; Possekkel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts*, 113–26; Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, 21 and 176.

<sup>47</sup> See Ramelli, “Origen” in *History of Mind and Body*.

<sup>48</sup> Especially in Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa* and “Bardaisan. . . and his Reading of Scripture in the Light of Plato.”

<sup>49</sup> See Ramelli, “Linee generali per una presentazione” and “Bardesane e la sua scuola,” with documentation, and *Bardaisan on Human Nature, Fate, and Free Will*.

<sup>50</sup> See Ramelli, “Origen, Bardaisan, and the Origin of Universal Salvation.”

<sup>51</sup> See full analysis in Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, 298–339.

<sup>52</sup> First edition by F. Nau in *Patrologia Syriaca* 1.2.513–514 on the basis of Syr. Ms. Paris 241, fol. 17v; critical edition now in Camplani, “Note bardesanitiche,” 18–21. Translation mine.

<sup>53</sup> Investigation in my “Rejection of the Epicurean Ideal of Pleasure.”

<sup>54</sup> See Ramelli, “Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism” and, for Philo’s influence, “Philo as One of the Main Inspirers.”

<sup>55</sup> See Ramelli, “Diogene Laerzio e Clemente Alessandrino nel contesto,” “Diogene Laerzio e i Cristiani,” and my introductory essay in Reale, Ramelli, and Girgenti, *Diogene Laerzio*, xxxiii–cxxxviii; Mensch and Miller, *Diogenes Laertius*, and supporting papers, including James Allen, “Epicurus in Diogenes Laertius.”

<sup>56</sup> See Ramelli, “Alcune osservazioni su *credere*” and *Studi su Fides*.

<sup>57</sup> Clement explains that Col. 2:8 does not criticize every kind of philosophy, but only Epicureanism, in that it denies divine providence and divinizes pleasure.

<sup>58</sup> See Ramelli, “The Logos/Nous One-Many between ‘Pagan’ and Christian Platonism.”

<sup>59</sup> See Ramelli, “Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism.”

<sup>60</sup> Marksches, *Origenes und sein Erbe*, 139–141 and my review. He also observes that the ten passages included by Usener in his *Epicurea*, all from *Contra Celsum*, are not direct quotations from works of Epicurus or of Epicurean authors. Köckert, “The Use of Anti-Epicurean Polemics in Origen” offers a very brief overview of Origen’s criticism of Epicurus.

<sup>61</sup> Cataudella, “Celso e l’Epicureismo”; Ramelli, “Tracce di Montanismo nel *Peregrinus* di Luciano?” both admit of the possibility that Lucian’s Celsus and Origen’s Celsus might have been the same person; Marksches, *Origenes und sein Erbe*, 133–38 inclines to think that they were two distinct persons and Origen and Eusebius were mistaken.

<sup>62</sup> Galen wrote letters to “Celsus the Epicurean” (*De libris suis* 16). That Origen was simply mistaken about his identity is surmised by Frede, “Celsus philosophus Platonicus.”

<sup>63</sup> See Ramelli, “Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism”; new arguments in “Origen the Christian Middle/Neoplatonist,” “Trinitarian Meaning of Hypostasis,” “Ethos and Logos,” and *Origen of Alexandria*.

<sup>64</sup> Marksches, *Origenes und sein Erbe*, 144.

<sup>65</sup> *Pauci sunt qui regem sibi futurum volunt credere, dum aut curam negant humanorum operum Deo esse, aut consolandam eorum quae impie egerunt conscientiam praesumpta animae et corporis abolitione nolunt divinum in bonos et malos constitutum esse iudicium.*

<sup>66</sup> *Sunt enim philosophi et fuerunt qui omnino nullam habere censerent rerum humanarum procurationem deos. Quorum si vera sententia est, quae potest esse pietas, quae sanctitas, quae religio?*

<sup>67</sup> On Plutarch’s polemic against Epicureanism see Dorandi, “Gli scritti antiepicurei di Plutarco.”

<sup>68</sup> *Verum ille fortasse impunitatem vitiis suis spopondit: fuit enim turpissimae voluptatis assertor.* The very expression *assertor voluptatis* for Epicurus was already used by Ambrose, *Ep.* 63 (PL 16.1199A).

<sup>69</sup> On kinetic and katastematic pleasure in Epicureanism, see Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ch. 7.

<sup>70</sup> On the admission of both women and slaves at school by Epicureans and Stoics, and their anti-Aristotelian tenets, see Ramelli, *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery*, ch. 1.

<sup>71</sup> Ambrose *Ep.* 63: *Clamat ergo ille, ut Hermarchus [codd. Demarchus] adserit, quia non potatione nec comissiones nec filiorum soboles nec feminarum copulae nec piscium copia aliorumque huiusmodi quae splendido usui parantur convivii suavem vitam faciant, sed sobria disputatio.* Cf. Epicurus *Ep. Men.* 132: “For it is not drinking and eating abundantly without interruption, not enjoying boys and women, nor tasting fish and all other kinds of food which a rich table bears, that make a pleasant life, but sober reasoning.”

<sup>72</sup> Examination in my *Origen of Alexandria’s Philosophical Theology*, in preparation.

<sup>73</sup> Dorandi, “The School and Texts of Epicurus in the Early Centuries of the Roman Empire.”

<sup>74</sup> For his following Origen as a Christian philosopher see Ramelli, *Gregorio di Nissa sull’anima e la resurrezione*, “Christian Soteriology and Christian Platonism” and “Gregory of Nyssa’s Exegesis.”

<sup>75</sup> See Ramelli, “Gregory on the Soul (and the Restoration).”

<sup>76</sup> This translation is based on the edition by Ramelli, *Gregorio di Nissa sull’anima e la resurrezione*.

<sup>77</sup> Rufinus: *Si mundi conditor Deus esse tam evidenter ostenditur, qui erit Epicuro locus introducendi atomos et adserendi quod ex corpusculis insensibilibus non solum sensibilia corpora, sed et mentes intellectuales ac rationales fiant? Sed dices, ut Epicuro visum est, continuatione*

*atomorum indesinenti cursu venientium, per immensa et sine fine tempora miscentium se atque in unum conglobantium corpora solida efficiuntur. Aiunt enim corpuscula ipsa, quae atomos appellant, diversis esse qualitatibus.*

<sup>78</sup> *Dicit Epicurus non esse providentiam, et voluptatem maximum bonum (In Is. 7.9 on Isa. 18:1).*

<sup>79</sup> See Ramelli, “Origen and Augustine.”

<sup>80</sup> Augustine *Ep.* 118.21: *Quos iam certe nostra aetate sic obmutuisse conspiciamus, ut vix iam in scholis rhetorum commemoretur tantum quae fuerint illorum sententiae.*

## PART III

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# EARLY MODERN AND LATER RECEPTION

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## CHAPTER 24

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# HUMANIST DISSEMINATION OF EPICUREANISM

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ADA PALMER

Coming across Epicurus's *Accepted Maxims* . . . he brought it into the middle of the market place, there burned it . . . and cast the ashes into the sea. He issued an oracle on this occasion: "The dotard's maxims to the flames be given." The fellow had no conception of the blessings conferred by that book upon its readers, of the peace, tranquility, and independence of mind it produces, of the protection it gives against terrors, phantoms and marvels, vain hopes and inordinate desires, of the judgement and candour that it fosters, or of its true purging of the spirit, not with torches and squills and such rubbish, but with right reason, truth, and frankness.

Lucian, c. 170 CE<sup>1</sup>

Renaissance scholars knew how controversial Epicureanism was—how glowingly celebrated and how fiercely condemned—long before they knew *what* Epicureanism was, at least in any detail. Fragments came first, references in ancients and Church Fathers, mixtures of praise and blame, and partial descriptions of isolated doctrines, some accurate, some slanderous, impossible to tell apart. Scholars also knew how to find out more. At least three ninth-century manuscripts of Lucretius's *De rerum*



*natura* stood ready on library shelves,<sup>2</sup> while the letters and maxims of Epicurus preserved by Diogenes Laertius circulated in the East, one sea voyage away. The celebrated Renaissance rediscovery of ancient thought did not begin with excavating Rome's ruins, or following a coded riddle to some hidden library where *X* marked the spot. The first archaeology was textual, born from the suggestion that the materials already available from antiquity could be used in a new way, and that further materials which might be uncovered were worth the cost and danger. If in 1417 Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) risked life and fortune crossing the Alps to search monastery libraries for books that had sat unopened for five hundred years, and if the future Pope Nicholas V (1397–1455) funded a costly expedition to Constantinople so Giovanni Aurispa (1376–1459) could bring back Greek classics including Diogenes Laertius, these celebrated moments in the history of Epicureanism were part of a larger transformation in what Europe read, how Europe read, and why Europe read.

## THE RENAISSANCE CONTEXT

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But, as the state of Things would then permit,  
Men burn'd their Friends, nor look'd on just, and fit:  
And Want, and Poverty did oft engage  
A thousand acts of Violence and Rage;  
Some, O imperious Want! A Carcass spoil,  
And burn their Friend upon anothers Pile . . .

Lucretius VI 1248–53, Thomas Creech translation, 1682<sup>3</sup>

Renaissance readers felt all too vividly how well Lucretius's horrific description of the Athenian plague fit their own age. Italy was dying, this apocalyptic sense fires the works of the fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century students of antiquity, whom we would later call the first humanists. The Black Death was one apocalypse, but other plagues—malaria, typhoid, the endemic pox—seemed to become more deadly too, their body count growing apace with the increase of bloody faction fighting: wars of conquest, wars of vendetta, “cruel wars for light causes,” as Petrarch (1304–74) wrote in his poem “Italia Mia” (*Canzoniere* 128; 1344), a tearful, desperate plea for peace.

Progress, strangely, was the primary cause of the crisis. Prosperity made trade and travel spread contagions faster, while dense, thriving cities were richer breeding grounds for violence and disease, and wealthier powers, armed with the newest innovations, could wage larger, deadlier wars. Within Italy, families made rich by trade and banking had more money in their coffers than the fragile city-states which reared them, and could hire mercenaries to topple precarious republics, shedding much blood in the transition. The vast ultramontane kingdoms were also growing in population and ambition: France, Aragon, Castile, the Empire, all mammoths compared to Italy's tiny city-states. These kingdoms dominated Italy, some parts by conquest, but others through culture, as French pub songs, fashions, and chivalric tales so saturated the Italian peninsula that—from Petrarch's perspective—they seemed to threaten to turn Italians into Frenchmen without any troops crossing the Alps. Thus, in the Italian experience, the early Renaissance was darker than the "Dark Ages" which it invented, a name more aspirational than factual when its Florentine creator Leonardo Bruni (c. 1370–1444) sought to build momentum and civic pride by portraying this difficult moment as the beginning of an upward climb, with better things to come.

The desperate measure proposed for this desperate time was antiquity, to look back at the golden age of Rome—even more golden in imagination than reality—when a united Roman Italy had conquered upstart France and Spain, and paved safe roads from London to Antioch. If fractured Italy could resurrect Rome's lost arts, and above all the lost educational system that had raised statesmen as valiant as Caesar, as eloquent as Cicero, and as virtuous as Seneca, then a new generation of pseudo-Romans might put an end to selfish civil broils, and new Virgils and Ovids might awe all Europe with their immortal verses. It was an idealist's dream but, in a desperate world that had no other plan, it was a lifeline. Upstart families made powerful by merchant gold or mercenary conquests could never compete in pedigree with descendants of Charlemagne, but they could fill their palaces with busts of Caesars, hire humanist secretaries to intimidate guests and correspondents with classicizing prose, and have tutors raise their sons and daughters on Latin and, in time, on Greek, producing youths and maidens more princely than princes. Soon ambassadors from France, arriving filled with scorn for the weakling Italian city-states, found themselves gaping at impossibly massive bronze statues, dumbstruck by ferociously ornate

orations, and dazzled by bright, airy spaces ringed by rounded arches reminiscent of the Roman ruins that still studded France's countryside. These things were not grander than the gothic cathedrals and chateaus of France, but their novelty was powerful, more so since it echoed the cultural vocabulary of antiquity, which had trickled forward through the Middle Ages. The basics of this ancient cultural vocabulary were already largely legible to everyone, but had not before been wielded with such systematic intentionality.

This humanist project was simultaneously propagandistic and sincere. Humanists and their earliest patrons hoped and expected that youths steeped in classical virtue, and rulers surrounded by virtuous courtiers, would rule more justly, more rationally, and therefore more successfully. As James Hankins has argued, humanists redefined nobility, developing a "virtue politics" which claimed that true nobility lay in the exercise of virtue.<sup>4</sup> This merit-based claim relocated political legitimacy, separating it from blood and chivalry, and locating it in moral education, character, and personal actions. Legitimate power now equaled power well exercised. This appealed in an Italy full of new powers, where traditional political legitimacy was virtually absent, so newborn republics, freshly planted conquerors, and the subjects of both all needed an understanding of nobility which could exist in, explain, and shape their political reality. Through humanism, Italy redefined nobility, which suddenly lay in classical education and, on the surface level, in possessing the trappings of antiquity. By this definition, Italian powers had—indeed excelled at—nobility and legitimacy, even if they had not a drop of noble blood. And, on the surface level, most of Europe's other powers consented to this redefinition, racing to fill their courts with antique and Italian arts. Though it might seem disadvantageous for France and her peers to accept a new definition of nobility which put Italy first, this new nobility gave ultramontane powers a valuable new non-military axis on which to compete with each other, as diplomats could impress courts with orations and antiquities as well as gems and armor, and weak princes could awe their nobles and subjects with the imported trappings of ancient Caesars. Princes now decorated and displayed their libraries as proudly as their armories, and as far away as England royal princes—such as Duke Humphrey of Gloucester (1390–1447) and Cardinal Beaufort (1375–1447), rivals for power during the minority of Henry VI—used imported Italian humanism to vie for influence

over court and people. Some of these rulers—like Cosimo (1389–1464) and Lorenzo (1449–92) de Medici who had Marsilio Ficino (1433–99) read Plato to them on their deathbeds—were sincerely touched and shaped by the classical values humanists hoped would heal Europe. Others saw humanist courtiers as mere court furniture, tools of self-fashioning like fine horses or gold tableware, yet even a halfhearted patron sustained sincere intellectuals, and enabled the diffusion of knowledge in a world where a single manuscript might cost several years' wages for a humble scholar.

Humanism's great propaganda coup failed to defend Italy from plagues, feuds, and invasions, but it did succeed in defending against the cultural conquest Petrarch had so feared. Petrarchan sonnets and classical themes entered the pub songs and popular plays in France and England, and Italian arts and culture were so treasured by Europe that conquerors and invaders protected, nourished, and diffused them. If by the eighteenth century there were humanist schools in the American colonies, and Roman porphyry in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, the momentum which helped neoclassicism spread so far began with Petrarch's desperate hope. Lucretius reached Voltaire's bookshelf, and Epicurean materialism entered Hobbes's thought, thanks to the same momentum. That this momentum could successfully protect and disseminate Epicureanism, a system fundamentally at odds with many of the hybrid classical and Christian virtues that humanism celebrated, demonstrates how humanist scholarly practices ultimately mined much more from Europe's classical inheritance than the politically expedient virtues which were their first object.

## EPICUREANISM WITHOUT EPICUREANS

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Who would think that [Lucretius] had a brain when he said these things?

Lactantius, *De ira dei* X, c. 313 CE

Before any Renaissance humanist set eyes upon the works of Lucretius or Diogenes Laertius, Epicureanism was known primarily as a form of hedonism, and discussed in the context of heresy. Denunciations of Epicureanism as a pernicious sect which helped sinners justify their wicked lifestyles survived in the works of Christian apologists including Arnobius,

Ambrose, and especially Lactantius, whose lengthy rebuttal of Epicureanism in *Divinae institutiones* 3 provided more detail about Epicurean doctrine than anything else in circulation after 900. While Epicurean physics, epistemology, and sense theory were practically unknown, it was well known that Epicurus denied the afterlife, divine judgment, and providence, and argued that pleasure was the highest good. Epicureanism was often used as a general label for denial of the immortality of the soul, as in Dante's *Inferno* which reserves the sixth circle for "Epicurus and his followers" (10.13–15), that is everyone who denied the afterlife. Most references to Epicureanism before, and indeed after, the recovery of ancient primary sources were even vaguer than Dante's. "Epicurean" was employed as a generic term of abuse, linked to the assumption that those who do not fear divine judgment will have no reason to refrain from sin and criminality. Even through the Reformation, figures from Erasmus and Luther to unpopular popes and their defenders were attacked with a palette of vaguely defined, interchangeable negative labels including atheist, sodomite, and Epicurean.<sup>5</sup>

The strongest antidotes to this negative use of Epicureanism available to Petrarch and his contemporaries were discussions in Cicero's philosophical works, and Seneca. Seneca described the Epicurean ideal of pleasure, not as gluttony or debauchery whose surfeit leads to illness and misery, but as sitting in a beautiful garden enjoying a modest meal of healthy porridge and discussing philosophy with friends (*Sen. Ep.* 21.10). Cicero's philosophical works, particularly *Academica*, *De natura deorum*, *De finibus*, *Tusculanae quaestiones*, *De divinatione*, and *De fato*, treated specific Epicurean doctrines coequally with Stoic and Platonic ones. Since Cicero considered Epicurus a serious philosopher, Cicero's Renaissance readers came to view Epicureanism as one of the puzzle pieces missing from their reconstruction of classical thought. These works of Cicero had been available throughout the Middle Ages, but humanist readers used them differently. Petrarch, his contemporary Boccaccio (1313–75), Poggio, and others also knew of the existence of the *De rerum natura* of Lucretius through quotations in Macrobius,<sup>6</sup> while praise of Lucretius survived in the works of Ovid (*Amores* 1.15.23–24), Cicero (*Q. fr.* 14.2.), the portion of Quintilian which was already in circulation before 1400 (10.1.87), and passing references in Donatus, Jerome's translation of Eusebius, Pliny the Younger, Aelius Donatus, Aulus Gellius, Servius, Priscian, and many grammarians.<sup>7</sup>

The information provided by these sources was neither systematic nor comprehensive, but it was enough for humanist and master philologist Lorenzo Valla (1407–37) to compose a dialogue, *De voluptate* or *De summo bono*, based on Seneca and Cicero. This dialogue sets out an Epicurean ethics and philosophy of life, contrasted with Stoicism, but invented by Valla based on the idea of pleasure as the highest good, without any trace of atomism, denial of the immortal soul, or anything to directly challenge Christian orthodoxy.<sup>8</sup> Valla's imagined Epicurean is an Epicurean in ethics only, valorizing pleasure and rejecting Stoic suicide, an exercise in moral philosophy without interest in other branches of philosophy. Thus medieval and early Renaissance Epicureanism was seen as a sophisticated hedonism—atomism, physics, and ontology followed in a separate stage.

## RECOVERY AND DISSEMINATION

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You have revived so many illustrious men, and such wise men, who were dead for eternity, through whose minds and teachings not only we but our descendants will be able to live well and honorably. If our ancestors decided that a triumph should be awarded to those who had captured forts and cities . . . I should decree a triumph for you, since surely their learning and their reasoning power could bring the human race more benefit by far than the deeds of a few illustrious generals ever brought.

Francesco Barbaro to Poggio Bracciolini, July 6, 1417.<sup>9</sup>

New humanist reading practices quickly extracted what information about Epicureanism was available in the works of Seneca and Cicero, and mined Epicurean fragments from Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Plutarch, and many others, but systematic understanding of Epicureanism, particularly of its physics, was possible only with the recovery of Lucretius and Diogenes Laertius.

Lucretius's rediscoverer Poggio Bracciolini was one of the central figures of the first generation of humanists raised after Petrarch. He was born to a minor family in a minor Tuscan town, but his father, hoping his son's penchant for languages might be shaped toward a profitable career, sent the boy to study Latin with one of Petrarch's few surviving friends, Giovanni Malpaghino of Ravenna (c. 1346–1417). That Florence's rhetoric professor at the time came from as far afield as Ravenna is a reminder that

Petrarch's primacy as a founder of classicizing humanism is due, not only to his excellent work and self-promotion, but to his survival while so many of his friends, co-founders of the movement, perished from the very real dangers Petrarch described, many in the Black Death itself and, one, in a bandit attack during its lawless aftermath;<sup>10</sup> even Malpaghino's teaching at Florence was interrupted by a recurrence of plague which shut down the *studio* from 1405–1411. As for young Poggio, his career would become typical of humanists, beginning as a copyist and notary, then a secretary, then entering the Roman Curia and rising through the ranks from scribe to papal secretary. Poggio undertook his celebrated book-hunting expedition in 1415–17 because he was left abruptly unemployed. At the Council of Constance, as part of the efforts to resolve the Western Schism, Poggio's patron Pope John XXIII (1370–1419) was deposed and declared an antipope, leaving Poggio in Switzerland, far from anyone willing to take on the courtier of a deposed pope, but close to many monasteries where he might find relics of antiquity. In his letter of July 6, 1417, Venetian humanist and politician Francesco Barbaro (1390–1454) lauded Poggio as a new Asclepius, who had resurrected Tertullian, Quintilian, Asconius Pedianus, Silius Italicus, Marcellinus, Marcus Manilius, Lucius Septimus, Valerius Flaccus, Caprus, Euty chius, Probus, and Lucretius.<sup>11</sup>

Poggio's letters do not tell us where precisely he found the Lucretius manuscript, which was likely a tenth-century copy of the Codex Oblongus.<sup>12</sup> He could not obtain the original, but transcribed it and sent his transcription to his friend Niccolò Niccoli (1364–1437), the most celebrated book-collector of his day, and a central figure in the social world of Florentine humanism. Increasingly plaintive letters from Poggio to Niccolò composed over seventeen years—some of which Poggio spent in the service of Cardinal Beaufort, who tapped Poggio's humanist learning as a tool for his political ambitions in the English Court—testify to Poggio's unsuccessful efforts to secure the return of his Lucretius, or even extract a copy, and Niccolò retained sole control of the manuscript until his death in 1437. Thus, even though the poem reached Florence in 1417, it did not circulate in Italy for another twenty years.

As Lucretius waited in Niccolò's jealous guard, other new Epicurean sources surfaced. The same travels on which Poggio recovered the *De rerum natura* also uncovered other authors who discussed Lucretius, including Statius (*Silvae* 2.7.76), Cornelius Nepos (*Atticus* 12.4), the



remainder of Quintilian (1.4.4–5), and Tertullian, with his ferocious, and informative, attacks on Epicureanism. The same period saw the arrival of Diogenes Laertius. Some of the biographical content of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives* was already available through the popular medieval compendium *On the Lives and Mores of the Philosophers*, erroneously attributed to Walter Burley (c. 1275–1344/5), which survives in over 270 manuscripts, and was printed as early as 1470.<sup>13</sup> But pseudo-Burley did not contain the invaluable letters of Epicurus, which became available for the first time thanks to a complete Diogenes Laertius manuscript retrieved by Giovanni Aurispa in the 1420s, on the expedition to Constantinople funded by Tommaso Parentucelli (Pope Nicholas V). Aurispa brought the Greek manuscript to Florence, where Cosimo de Medici (1389–1464) commissioned the humanist-theologian and Camaldolese monk Ambrogio Traversari (1386–1439) to undertake a Latin translation, which he completed in 1433. The translation circulated immediately, and remained popular well into the seventeenth century. Four years after its completion Niccolò Niccoli died, and Cosimo de Medici volunteered to pay the book collector's substantial posthumous debts in return for his library of some eight hundred manuscripts, including the *De rerum natura*. Thus it was Cosimo who finally allowed Lucretius to multiply.

The fifty-four surviving Renaissance manuscripts of Lucretius, produced between 1417 and the 1520s, map out the poem's initial dissemination, and those responsible for it.<sup>14</sup> Half the surviving manuscripts are luxurious volumes on vellum, usually substantial quarto-sized volumes with illuminated decoration; the princely cost of such volumes vividly demonstrates fifteenth-century humanism's deep dependence upon wealthy patrons. The other half of the manuscripts are comparatively inexpensive paper copies, often smaller and more heavily annotated, thus created for and used by scholars, though many scholars left notes and corrections in the margins of the opulent copies owned by their patrons as well.

Medicean Florence was the epicenter of the poem's dissemination. A lavish illuminated copy (now Laurenziana Laur. 35.27) was produced for Cosimo's grandsons Lorenzo and Giuliano (1453–78), another (Laur. 35.25) for Lorenzo's son Piero (1472–1503), and a third (Laur. 35.36) bears Medici arms. Another illuminated copy was created in Florence for the Medici's foes the Pazzi family (Abbey manuscript 3236; presumably predating 1478), another (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbib. Cod. lat. mon.

816a) for Piero Vettori (1499–1585), and a third (Laur. 35.28) for Francesco Sassetti (1421–90), general manager of the Medici bank. Sassetti's manuscript was transcribed by Bartolomeo Fonzio (c. 1445–1513), who also helped King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary (1443–90) assemble his celebrated humanist library, so Fonzio was likely involved in the production of Corvinus's lavishly illuminated Lucretius (Vienna Vind. Pal. 170). At least six paper manuscripts were also produced in Florence, of which the oldest (Laur. 35.30) is Niccolò Niccoli's transcription of Poggio's copy—the version in Poggio's hand does not survive. Other inexpensive Florentine manuscripts include Laur. 35.39, annotated by the poet and Medici courtier Angelo Poliziano (1454–94), and Laur. 35.32 with notes associated with Poliziano's successor at the Studio Fiorentino Marcello Adriani (1464–1521).<sup>15</sup> The most celebrated Lucretius scholar of the later fifteenth century was the Greek Neo-Latin poet Michele Tarcaniota Marullo (c. 1458–1500), associated with the Medici through his marriage to the poetess and Greek scholar Alessandra Scala (1475–1506), daughter of the Medici partisan and statesman Bartolomeo Scala (1430–97), who also drew on Lucretius in his own works. Marullo's much-lamented death by drowning en route to battle Cesare Borgia (1475–1507) in 1500 prevented the publication of his corrected Lucretius, but his emendations circulated widely and were used by most editors of sixteenth-century print editions. They were also used by Machiavelli (1469–1527), who incorporated them into his own Lucretius manuscript (BAV Ross. Lat. 884), improving the text which he copied from the woefully defective 1495 print edition. Florentine enthusiasm for the *De rerum natura* is also evidenced by Lucretian imagery in the paintings of Piero di Cosimo (1462–1522), such as *The Forest Fire*, and of Botticelli (1445–1510), such as *Venus and Mars* and the *Primavera*.<sup>16</sup> Of the eighteen manuscripts with unclear provenance, five have the white vine decoration typical of Florence and northern Italy, or of manuscripts consciously imitating northern-Italian models.

Padua and Venetian territories were another early center of interest in Lucretius.<sup>17</sup> Two manuscripts (Padua, Biblioteca Capitolare C.76 and C.75) belonged to Venetian patrician bishops of Padua, Jacopo Zeno (1417–81) and Pietro Barozzi (1441–1507), and the first Lucretius manuscript to enter England (Bodleian Auct. F 1 13) was created in Padua for John Tiptoft, 1st Earl of Worcester (1427–70). Venetian territories also produced all four

incunabular print editions of Lucretius: Brescia c. 1473, Verona 1486, Venice 1495, and Venice 1500.

In Rome, Lorenzo Valla's student and successor Pomponio Leto (1428–98) and his many students left extensive annotations in two manuscripts (BAV Ottob. Lat. 2834 and Naples BN IV E 51), and in a copy of the 1486 print edition, which also contains Leto's short life of Lucretius, and a commentary on the opening dedication to Venus (1486, Utrecht Universiteitsbib. Litt. Lat. X fol. 82 rar).<sup>18</sup> Leto's student Giovanni Sulpizio da Veroli (Verolano; active c. 1470–90) transcribed two complete Lucretius manuscripts.<sup>19</sup> Like Marullo, Leto did not publish his work on Lucretius, but its fame is proved by a manuscript (Basel, OBU F.VIII.14) from the library of the Swiss jurist Bonifacius Amerbach (1495–1562), which contains transcriptions of Leto's corrections and marginal commentary, and even boasts of Leto's contributions on its tooled leather cover. Other Italian manuscripts belonged to Francesco Marescalchi of Ferrara (Paris BN Lat. 10,306)—a correspondent of Poggio and Lorenzo Valla—and to Popes Pius II (Enea Silvio Bartolomeo Piccolomini 1405–64; owner of Ambros. Ms. E 125 sup.), and Sixtus IV (Francesco della Rovere, 1414–84; owner of BAV Vat. Lat. 1569), while another bears Milanese arms (New York, Pierpont Morgan MS 482). A copy now in Piacenza (Passerini-Landi, Landi Cod. 33) was written by Francesco Bernardino Cipelli (1481–c. 1540), and another fifteenth-century manuscript (BAV Vat. Lat. 3275) later entered the library of Fulvio Orsini (1529–1600).

Aragon was the first major center of interest in Lucretius outside Italy. Aragon's strong ties with Naples provided steady access to Italian scholarship, and interest in the poet was likely strengthened by the long tradition of Iberian interest in Epicureanism.<sup>20</sup> The manuscript (BAV Vat. Lat. 3276, dated 1442) annotated by Panormita (Antonio Beccadeli; 1394–1471) was created while he was in Naples in the service of Alfonso V (1396–1458). Alfonso V was also the patron of Panormita's protégé Giovanni Pontano (1426–1503), whose work on Lucretius survives in annotations in a copy of the 1500 print edition made in Naples by his student Girolamo Borgia (1475–1550), who also produced the second Renaissance *vita* of Lucretius.<sup>21</sup> It was through the circle of Pontano and Panormita that the astronomer Lorenzo Bonincontri (1410–91) encountered the *De rerum natura*, which influenced his scientific poems *Rerum*

*naturalium* (1469), *Rerum naturalium et divinis ad Laurentium Medicem* (1475), and *De rebus coelestibus* (published 1526) dedicated to Ferdinand II of Aragon.<sup>22</sup> Other Neapolitan manuscripts include one (València, Univ. 733) with the arms of Alfonso V's son Ferrante (Ferdinand I) of Naples (1423–94); a second (BL MS 11912) transcribed by Gianrinaldo Mennio of Sorrento (c. 1465–94), a favored calligrapher at the royal court of Naples; a third (BAV Barb. Lat. 154.1 (IX.23)) created for the Neapolitan condottiero and celebrated patron of humanism Andrea Matteo Acquaviva (c. 1458–1529); and a fourth (BL Harl. 2694) transcribed by Clemens Salernitanus of Salerno. Two other manuscripts, now in Madrid (BNE ms. 2885) and Zaragoza (BC Ms. 11–36), and another with Aragonese arms (Cambridge, Nn.2.40) testify to further Iberian-Neapolitan interest in Lucretius. Even the copy commissioned by Matthias Corvinus of Hungary is part of this Aragonese family, since the Raven King's celebrated library-building and humanist activities were facilitated by his connections with Aragonese Naples via his wife and political partner, Beatrice of Naples Twice Queen of Hungary (1457–1508).

The printing of the classics first flourished in Italy from the 1470s on. In the 1450s and 1460s, Gutenberg and his immediate successors had found printing distressingly unprofitable, since, without established distribution mechanisms, it was difficult to find a market for hundreds of copies of the same text among the comparatively small cities of landlocked Germany. Italy contained wealthy patrons delighted to pay the costs of printing works edited by their humanist courtiers in return for seeing their names and virtues celebrated on the title page. Italy also contained the great trade hub of Venice, whence a few hundred books could be exported on a hundred ships to a hundred cities.

Traversari's Latin translation of Diogenes Laertius was first printed in Rome c. 1472, and Lucretius in Brescia c. 1473. Like many incunabular classics, the first three Lucretius editions contained extremely corrupt texts, and were superseded in the last decade of the 1400s when the celebrated Aldus Manutius (1449–1515) moved from Rome to Venice and revolutionized the printing of literature with his project to print all the Greek and Latin classics in affordable, corrected editions overseen by the finest scholars of his day. In 1500 Aldus issued a quarto Lucretius, edited by Hieronymus Avancius, and in 1515 a pocket-sized octavo edited by his son-in-law Andrea Navagero (1483–1529). Johannes Baptista Pius (1460–

1540) produced the first annotated edition of Lucretius in Bologna in 1511. Aldus also printed Diogenes Laertius's *Lives* of Aristotle and Theophrastus with his Greek Aristotle in 1497, but Traversari's Latin version, frequently reprinted and emended, remained the main access point for Diogenes Laertius's discussions of Epicureanism even after the complete Greek text was printed for the first time in Basel in 1533 by Johann Froben (1460–1527), great printer and friend of Erasmus (1466–1536). A more enduring version was printed by Henri II Estienne (1528–98) in Lyon in 1570, reprinted in Geneva in 1593 with notes by Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614).

The prominence of these northern printers in the circulation of Diogenes Laertius reflects a general migration of printing out of Italy over the first half of the sixteenth century. The proliferation of small, inexpensive pocket and classroom editions, and the maturation of book fairs and other distribution methods, made French, Swiss, German, and Netherlandish printers increasingly prosperous, leading to the rise of such great printing centers as Paris, Frankfurt, and Amsterdam. After the 1512 Guintine and 1515 Aldine octavos no Lucretius editions were printed in Italy for 132 years. This abrupt end to Italian Lucretius printing coincided with a ban on teaching Lucretius and other “licentious” literature issued by Florence in 1517, but also matched larger printing trends. Production of Lucretius reached its peak with a flurry of pocket and classroom editions in the 1540s, mainly produced in France, followed by the massive 1563 annotated edition by Parisian Aristotelian Denys Lambin (1520–72), and the deluxe but practical 1565–66 classroom edition produced by Lambin's rival Gifanius (Hubert van Giffen, 1534–1604), which supplemented Lucretius's poem with excerpts from Cicero treating Epicureanism, Thucydides's description of the plague, a robust vocabulary list, and other reading aids. By 1600, thirty printed editions had spread thirty thousand copies to every corner of Europe.

These transformations of Lucretius's text over time reflect a change in what kind of reader had access to his Epicurean ideas. Initially only a narrow audience of philological experts was capable of wading through corrupt manuscripts, but by the 1510s printed and corrected editions opened the text up to a broader audience of predominantly Italian, literary readers, and in the second half of the sixteenth century annotations, supplements, and further corrections opened Lucretius to an even broader audience of students and casual scholars across Europe.

Vernacular translations broadened audiences even more, aided by digests and paraphrases. Both Cicero and Diogenes Laertius enjoyed comparatively unrestricted circulation in Latin and vernaculars. Cicero's philosophical works were printed in overwhelming quantities as soon as the press was created, and the dialogues with Epicurean content had already been printed at least ten times in Latin in the incunabular period. Some of Cicero's dialogues were translated into English and German before 1500 as well, but vernacular printing of the *Tusculanae quaestiones* and others began in Italian and German in the 1520s, followed quickly by English and French. Diogenes Laertius's vernacular circulation began with a 1545 Italian translation by Bartolomeo, Lodovico, and Pietro Rositini. Giosefo Salviati's Italian paraphrase of the *Lives* followed in 1589, a French translation by François de Foucherolles in 1602, and another French translation by Gilles Boileau in 1658. Comments and annotations on Diogenes Laertius, primarily philological in nature, were published by Stephanus (1570), Isaac and Meric Casaubon (1583, 1593), and Gilles Ménage (1664, 1690).<sup>23</sup>

While Lucretius and Diogenes Laertius were first printed in Latin at about the same time—1472 and 1473—a century passed between the first vernacular Diogenes Laertius, printed in 1545 and the first vernacular Lucretius, the 1650 French translation by the abbot and avid translator, Michel de Marolles (1600–81). His translation was explosively popular in England, and likely inspired the two unpublished English translations in the early 1650s, one by Lucy Hutchinson (1620–81), and an anonymous manuscript now at the Bodleian.<sup>24</sup> These were followed by the printed 1656 English John Evelyn (1620–1706) translation of Book 1, a project Evelyn abandoned in outrage after the first book's publication was disastrously mishandled by the publisher. The first complete English translation was published by the cleric Thomas Creech in 1682 and remained popular well after his suicide in 1700, so much so that his notes on the text were translated into Latin for later Latin editions. De Wit's Dutch edition followed in 1701, a German version in 1784, and other vernaculars in the nineteenth century. Italian—often the earliest vernacular—is conspicuously absent. In 1669 Alessandro Marchetti (1633–1714), professor of mathematics at Pisa, had completed an Italian verse translation, but was denied permission to publish it in 1670 by the newly crowned Grand Duke Cosimo III of Florence (1642–1723). Even when Marchetti petitioned a second time, promising to mark all Epicurean “errors” in the margin with



asterisks, permission was still denied. This censorship, and the century of delay between the vernacular Diogenes Laertius and the first vernacular Lucretius, reflect the greater tension which surrounded the circulation of a text focused primarily on Epicureanism, in contrast with Diogenes Laertius who treated Epicureanism as one of many topics. It also reveals the asset which helped secure a kind of amnesty for the Latin *De rerum natura* which translations did not enjoy: Lucretius's original Latin verses.

## LUCRETIAN LANGUAGE AND EVOLVING SCHOLARLY READING PRACTICES

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When a single exemplar of Lucretius came into my hands I hesitated to print it, because it was difficult to correct from one copy those [verses] that had been neglected and ignored by scribes, but when I could not find another [copy], moved by that very difficulty, I wanted to make such an extremely rare book available, even if from only one exemplar.

Tomasso Ferrando, on his 1473 *editio princeps* of the *De rerum natura*<sup>25</sup>

The first humanists to read Lucretius had already seen him praised by Cicero, Ovid, and Quintilian, and, once they had the text in hand, their expectations of greatness were confirmed when they discovered that the inestimable Virgil had seen fit to copy lines from the *De rerum natura*. This poem was good Latin, and as humanists plunged enthusiastically into its depths, they left annotations in their manuscripts which reveal how humanist reading practices, especially attitudes toward language and the value of language, facilitated and filtered their interaction with ideas, including Epicureanism.<sup>26</sup> Annotating as one read remained the default reading practice well into the print period, and it was not until the last decades of the sixteenth century that the portion of books which contain marginal annotations dropped below 50 per cent.<sup>27</sup> Out of fifty-two manuscripts of Lucretius produced between 1417 and c. 1520, all but three contain annotation, and more than a third of them contain at least one note on almost every page.<sup>28</sup>

Dividing this annotation into categories, the most common form of humanist annotation is philological correction, identifying errors in the



Latin and suggesting alternatives.<sup>29</sup> This form of interaction with the text is common to all Renaissance manuscripts of the classics, and shows scholars' attempts to repair the damaged legacy of antiquity. Every Lucretius manuscript that contains any annotation at all contains philological corrections, with the sole exception of Machiavelli's copy, which he corrected as he transcribed it. Several manuscripts, including Niccolò Niccoli's copy and one likely used by Poliziano, contain no other types of notes, demonstrating a kind of reading focused primarily on textual correction.<sup>30</sup> Repair then, the actual healing of a mangled text, was one of the primary purposes of humanist reading.

The second most common form of annotation in the margins of Lucretius relates to the poem's language: 44 per cent of annotators transcribed rare vocabulary into the margins, such as the archaic and ambiguous verb *cluere* (to be named/acclaimed), or the unique Lucretian word *parvissima*. In the *Neapolitanus* manuscript, Pomponio Leto even composed an index on a flyleaf, listing by folio unusual vocabulary, neologisms, archaic forms, unusual uses of temporal adverbs, gerunds, and other points of grammar and vocabulary. Annotators also often marked lines which were imitated by Virgil or Ovid, writing "Virg" or "Ovid" in the margins—the fact that both poets saw fit to read and imitate Lucretius was discussed by later editors as a powerful endorsement of the poem's value.<sup>31</sup> Other annotators marked lines with unusual or defective scansion, or reduplicated verses. Such readers were clearly using Lucretius to expand their own knowledge of the Latin language itself, a priority connected more with the poem's form than with its content. One-third of manuscripts also contain annotation in Greek, usually supplying the original Greek term when Lucretius uses transliterated Greek or newly crafted Latin substitutes for Greek technical terms.

A third form of annotation, common in all Renaissance manuscripts of the classics and present in half of the surviving Lucretius manuscripts, is notes on classical *notabilia*, that is points where Lucretius mentions famous people such as Iphianassa (1.85), Empedocles (1.716), or Scipio (3.1034), places, such as Sicily (1.717), Mount Etna (1.722), the mountain of Helicon (1.118), or the Avernian lakes (6.738–39), and other features of classical belief and culture, such as Charybdis (1.772), or the rites of Cybele (2.600). Such notes reflect interest in the poem's philosophical content when they focus on other ancient thinkers such as Heraclitus (1.635), Anaxagoras

(1.830), or Democritus (3.371), but often reflect general interest in reconstructing the world of antiquity.

In manuscripts, and the incunables which are their contemporaries, notes on the philosophical content of the poem concentrate primarily on moral philosophy, especially Lucretius's exhortations toward tranquility, and his advice in Book 4 on how to avoid the snares of love. Most of these annotations are simply brackets or *manicula*, or single-word labels such as *Amor*. This demonstrates that Valla's interest in exploring an Epicurean ethics separated from the broader Epicurean system was not uncommon. The earliest Renaissance students of Epicureanism were substantially less interested in Epicurean materialism and scientific elements than in Epicurean ethics, and especially eudemonism—a focus similar to the Renaissance interest in Stoic moral philosophy divorced from Stoic ontology, and, indeed similar to ancient Roman interest in Stoicism as well.<sup>32</sup> Epicurean ethics, far more than its physics or ontology, was compatible with the syncretic hybrids of classical and Christian thought undertaken by so many fifteenth-century humanists. Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) are the best known of many scholars who thought that the classical virtues which Petrarch hoped could heal war-torn Europe lay hidden, not in the works of one thinker, but scattered through all the ancient sages. This expectation was shaped by Boethius's image of a tattered Lady Philosophy, from whom scraps of truth had been snatched and carried off by many zealous philosophical schools. To reconstruct the shredded whole, one needed to seek those scraps of philosophy within all schools—even the infamous Epicureans—that were compatible, both with each other and with Christianity. Thus, while the obvious “errors” of atomism or denial of the immortal soul were to be ignored or—in Ficino's case—refuted,<sup>33</sup> ethical messages could still be valuable to the larger healing process of humanist virtue politics.

While more than half of the surviving Lucretius manuscripts have annotation treating moral philosophy, fewer than a third of them have as much as one bracket or comment on any passage treating the details of atomism or materialism, and many have fewer corrections and philological notes in the sections of Book 2 and Book 3 where Lucretius focuses on the technical details of Epicurean physical theory, as if readers tended to skim quickly through those passages to return to the more comfortable pastoral vignettes and historical details. In fact, the fifty-two manuscripts together

contain more notes on the verb *cluere* than on Lucretius's arguments about the swerve, free will, vacuum, the creation of the world, and the mortality of the soul combined. Those few notes which do treat them are often negative or critical. Pomponio Leto carefully marked Lucretius's arguments against other ancient philosophers (Anaxagoras, Heraclitus), and his attacks on the immortality of the soul, which Leto labeled *opinio non christiana* (unchristian opinion)—a note which another reader transcribed into a copy transcribed from Leto's.<sup>34</sup> Two volumes—the manuscript once owned by Piero Vettori and an incunable now in Paris—contain the comment *absurditas in sententia* (absurd to consider) next to Lucretius's description of the famous random “swerve” of atoms, which is the Epicurean explanation of how free will can exist in a materialist cosmos.<sup>35</sup> The manuscript now in Piacenza contains diagrams illustrating Lucretius's discussions of winds and planetary conjunctions, but even these do not accurately reflect Lucretius's Epicurean physics, falling back on the default four elements theory.<sup>36</sup> Other manuscripts contain annotation focused on medical topics—the treatment of sex and fertility in Book 4, descriptions of drunkenness, epilepsy, and especially the account of the Athenian plague in Book 6, which was also sometimes excerpted for use as a medical text, but in which atomism and Epicurean details are barely present.

Only two of the fifty-two manuscripts contain non-critical comments on core principles of Epicurean physics, both Florentine copies. One is associated with the humanist statesman and lecturer Marcello Adriani, who demonstrates Lucretian interests in several of his surviving works.<sup>37</sup> The other is Machiavelli's, whose annotation defies all the patterns of his peers. Machiavelli left no corrections or notes on vocabulary, and few notes of any kind except in Book 2, in the same detailed discussions of how atoms function which most readers marked sparsely if at all. Machiavelli's headings focus on the very details of atomism which were most disruptive to Christian and Aristotelian orthodoxies, noting “nothing comes about by intention” (*nil fieri consilio*, 2.165), the Epicurean thesis opposing providence and intelligent design; “nothing is carried upward by nature” (*nil sursum ferri propria natura*, 2.128), against the idea that air, fire, and souls rise upward by nature; and “the gods do not care about mortal things” (*deos non curare mortalia*, 2.647), Epicurus's rejection of prayer and divine governance of human life and history. Pomponio Leto had also marked

some of Lucretius's rejections of divine action in nature, but Leto's comments concentrate on the apparent paradox of Lucretius's praying to Venus in the poem's opening passage while rejecting prayer later on, wrestling with rather than simply observing this particularly unchristian position.<sup>38</sup> Machiavelli also commented three times on Lucretius's discussion of the swerve; what other readers dismissed as "absurd" Machiavelli unpacked: "that motion is variable, and from this we have free will" (*motum varium esse et ex eo nos liberam habere mentem*, 2.252).<sup>39</sup> Of course, Machiavelli's own revolutionary consequentialist ethics would soon be the first moral system since Epicureanism to evaluate human action by itself, as if there were no divinity or larger order to factor into the moral equation. While Machiavelli's own works do not employ Epicurean specifics such as atoms or the swerve, his unique way of reading and annotating Lucretius shows how the *De rerum natura*, which his contemporaries used primarily as an exercise in Latin language and a sourcebook of classical trivia, was for Machiavelli valuable above all as a chance to explore an ethics which, like his, was divorced from divinity.

Machiavelli's notes, while radically different from those of his peers, are remarkably similar to those produced by readers fifty years later, in the margins of the numerous printed editions rushed out in the 1540s and later, primarily in France. These later, corrected texts, many equipped with vocabulary lists and explanatory glosses, no longer required the hours of philological correction which dominated fifteenth-century encounters with the *De rerum natura*. In such editions, the majority of marginal notes comment on the poem's content, especially on questions of science or medicine, often drawing comparisons to other authorities such as Democritus or Aristotle.<sup>40</sup> These notes show how humanist efforts transformed the reading process over time. In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the act of reading focused on textual repair and gleaning details about Latin and antiquity. By the late sixteenth century, reading focused more on content, and was open to students, scientists, doctors, and a wide variety of scholars with enough Latin to make it through the corrected texts bequeathed to them by the earlier generations of hard-working expert philologists. In fact, when Montaigne annotated his Lucretius in the 1560s, and devoted half his annotations to Lucretian language and the other half to substantive and controversial elements of Epicurean thought, his notes were substantially more philological in their

focus than those left in similar volumes by many of his anonymous peers, whose annotations focus almost exclusively on the poem's philosophical content.<sup>41</sup>

This is not to say that fifteenth-century humanists were oblivious to the poem's Epicurean content, only that, before the 1540s, atoms, vacuum, soul, and swerve were not the poem's primary appeal, or the focus of most readers' energies. Rather, the poetry itself, and the text's value as a sourcebook of general knowledge about antiquity and Roman ethics, drew many more Renaissance scholars to give their hours and efforts to the text than would have done so solely for its Epicurean messages. This guaranteed the survival and dissemination of the *De rerum natura*, even in a period when most readers considered its Epicurean content to be absurd at best, or deadly heresy at worst. Lucretius himself said that he chose to wrap his Epicureanism in beautiful Latin verses to trick the reader into reading it, as a doctor smears honey around the lip of a cup of bitter medicine to lure a child to drinking—for the Renaissance, at least, he could not have chosen a more effective bait.<sup>42</sup>

## CENSORSHIP AND PERSECUTION

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In this book Lucretius reasons of many Things excellently well, but has miscarry'd in his main Design, and does not so much as stagger the Belief of divine Providence, which he attacks with his utmost Force.

Thomas Creech, 1682<sup>43</sup>

In popular discourse, Renaissance Epicureanism is often invoked in narratives of secularization or modernization, which depict humanism as a prototype of Enlightenment rationalism, and the Renaissance as a heroic battle between revolutionary freethinkers and an oppressive and closed-minded Church. In such narratives, the recovered *De rerum natura* is often presented as a sudden weapon in the hands of revolutionaries, or a light in the darkness of superstition. Such narratives lead one to expect Lucretius to be prominent on the Inquisition's *Index* of forbidden authors, yet the *De rerum natura* was never burned—quite the contrary: in 1557 one of the great architects of the Roman Inquisition, Michele Ghislieri (1504–72)—the

future Pope Pius V—warned in a letter that those compiling the *Index* must be careful not to target works such as Lucretius, *Orlando Furioso*, and the *Decameron* which, Ghislieri said, may have some disreputable content but are harmless because everyone knows to read them as mere fables.<sup>44</sup> The actual history of Epicureanism’s encounters with censorship in the Renaissance reveals an apparatus of information control very different from the popular image of closet atheists hiding from zealots and bonfires, one in which intellectual clashes were more between rival theisms than between the Church and anything one could call secularization, and in which the most prominent opponents of Epicureanism were not top-down censoring bodies, but the very scholars—many extremely heterodox—who stood at the heart of intellectual and even scientific innovation.

Many of the most prominent scholars of Epicureanism might also be called anti-Epicureans. The earliest known act of Renaissance censorship of Epicureanism was one of self-censorship, when, in 1492, the undeniably heterodox yet ardently religious Platonist and priest Marsilio Ficino burned his youthful notes on Lucretius, and thereafter dedicated long sections of his *Platonic Theology* to defending the Christian and Platonic model of the immortal soul against Lucretius’s Epicurean attacks. Scipione Capece (1480–1551), one of Pontano’s successors as the head of the Neapolitan Accademia Pontaniana, imitated Lucretius’s style in his 1535 didactic poem against materialism, *De principiis rerum*. A year later Aonio Paleario (1503–70), a scholar of Greek and Hebrew and courtier of Leo X, published his anti-Lucretian *De immortalitate animorum* (1536) defending the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, again written in recognizably Lucretian verses. Denys Lambin’s massive 1563 commentary on Lucretius supplied the “correct” Aristotelian answers for every point at which Lambin felt that Lucretius erred by following Epicurus. In 1589 philosopher and poet Girolamo Frachetta (1558–1619), known for his 1581 dialogue on scholars’ melancholy, published the first vernacular Italian treatment of Lucretius, his *Breva Spositione di Tutta l’Opera di Lucretio*, which, as Frachetta described it, aimed to reveal where Lucretius agrees with Aristotle and where he errs by disagreeing with Aristotle. Frachetta also included extensive defenses of the immortality of the soul, and devoted a quarter of his lengthy index to listing Lucretius’s “errors,” including denial of providence, and belief in vacuum. In the 1650s Lucy Hutchinson stated that she undertook her private project to translate Lucretius into



English for the express purpose of understanding him clearly enough to feel she could firmly refute and defeat him.<sup>45</sup> As late as 1745 Cardinal Melchior de Polignac (1661–1742) published a Latin verse epic *Anti-Lucretius*, detailing, explaining, and rebutting what the cardinal saw as Lucretius's central errors. Though hostile to Epicureanism, these anti-Lucretian authors nonetheless brought Epicurean ideas and arguments before the eyes of thousands of readers, disseminating Epicureanism to many more people than Lucretius's three great editors—Pius, Lambin, and Gifanius—had ever reached with their exhaustive commentaries.<sup>46</sup>

Even Epicureanism's more sympathetic readers, those who positioned themselves as students rather than critics, consistently rejected those elements we associate with secularization, modernity, or atheism, such as the rejection of creation, providence, divine action, and the immortal soul. Lorenzo Valla's pre-Lucretian Epicureanism, which Christianized the Epicurean thesis that pleasure is the highest good, had many successors. The scientist and mathematician Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655) styled himself a Christian Epicurean, and defended atomism and an Epicurean form of empiricism against Aristotle while also writing works of mysticism and proofs of the existence of God and the afterlife. Jean-François Sarasin, in his 1656 *Discours de Morale sur Épicure*, stated that pious Christians were the best Epicureans because, through austerity and refraining from sin, they will be rewarded with eternal happiness after death—here pleasure as the highest good is redefined as Christian heavenly pleasure.

Of course, such authors' professions of orthodoxy might be insincere, cautious dissimulation intended to deflect criticism or persecution.<sup>47</sup> Such a reading is plausible in some cases. In 1504 in Bologna, for example, the Florentine philosophy professor Raffaello Franceschi published his *Lucretium Paraphrasis cum Appendice de Animi Immortalitate*, and his choice to treat only the first three books in his paraphrase may reflect reluctance, on the part of an author already notorious for sodomy, to approach the lengthy treatment of sexual intercourse in Book 4.<sup>48</sup> Franceschi also added an appendix with an elaborate anti-Epicurean defense of the immortality of the soul, which could be a sincere rebuttal of Lucretius, or a cautious attempt to avoid charges of heresy and atheism, so often associated with sodomy. Yet few cases present clear signs of authorial caution, and some demonstrate positive lack of caution, as in Ficino's



efforts to refute Epicurean heterodoxy by using equally if not more controversial heterodox content from other ancients.

The strongest evidence against the hypothesis that most of these anti-Epicurean or Christianized Epicurean texts are dissimulation concealing more radical Epicurean sentiments lies in the fact that so many of their authors were, in fact, investigated or persecuted for radical ideas or activities unrelated to, or even incompatible with, Epicureanism. In 1466 Pomponio Leto, who annotated Lucretius so thoroughly, was imprisoned in Venice on charges of sodomy, a crime often associated with Epicureanism and classical study, yet his Lucretius work was not mentioned in any documents related to his arrest. In 1468, when Leto was sent to Rome to face imprisonment and torture along with other members of his Academy, the accusation levied by Pope Paul II was that Leto and his friends had conspired to assassinate the pope and practiced pagan worship—charges distinctly at odds with Epicurean denial of prayer and political detachment. Records suggest that Pope Paul's suspicions were aroused more by the Academy's enthusiasm for Cicero's republican and anti-monarchal orations than any other author. Marsilio Ficino too was investigated by the Inquisition, but for his work on astrological magic, the *De triplici vita* (1489), not anything touching Epicureanism, or even his broader radical project to hybridize ancient and Christian theologies. Politics, not doctrine, caused Machiavelli's torture and exile. In 1516, the infamous materialist Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525) awoke the Inquisition's wrath with his *De immortalitate animi*, which argued that the immortality of the soul cannot be proved with logic, but critics consistently discussed Pomponazzi's radical use of Aristotle and Averroes, rather than his experiments with materialism or empiricism. As the Reformation heated up, Scipione Capece, author of the Lucretian anti-materialist *De principiis rerum*, was persecuted in Naples for Lutheran sympathies, and went into voluntary exile. Aonio Paleario, who had defended the immortal soul against Lucretius in his *De immortalitate animorum*, was burned at the stake as a heretic in 1570 for holding Protestant positions, above all for the classic Protestant move of criticizing the Roman Church for valuing tradition over Scripture. Neither the Capece nor Paleario prosecution documents mentioned Epicureanism, despite how frequently it was used as a synonym for Lutheranism in Counterreformation pamphlets.<sup>49</sup> Sperone Speroni (1500–88), who studied in Padua with Pomponazzi, was denounced to the Inquisition in 1575 partly

because of his *Dialogo d'amore*, which used Lucretian sexual imagery, but neither atomism nor attacks on the soul featured in the case.<sup>50</sup> And when Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) was burned at the stake for his heretical beliefs, which included Epicurean-influenced atomism and belief in multiple Earth-like worlds, his trial records indicate that Inquisitors consistently associated his heresies with Aristotle, and never brought up Epicureanism, while Bruno himself, at one point in the interrogation, brought up Lucretius explicitly in order to disagree with him.<sup>51</sup>

Licentiousness, sodomy, magic, Averroism, Lutheranism, radical Aristotelianism, Ciceronian republicanism—scholars of Lucretius and Epicureanism were certainly tangled with many controversial and persecuted activities, but Epicureanism itself was consistently absent from listed accusations. It is not plausible that so many scholars would employ artful dissimulation to deny Epicurean sympathies while taking less care to conceal their other far more dangerous views. Rather, Epicureanism was never high on the Inquisition's list of fears when it examined scholarly activity. The revolutionary Epicurean ideas available in Lucretius and Diogenes Laertius were indeed avidly studied by radicals, a few in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and more in the later sixteenth and seventeenth, but these radicals had a wide variety of interests, the majority of them orthogonal to, or even opposed to, anything we might call rationalism or secularization, and more aligned with theist or even mystical radicalisms of the day, such as syncretism, Protestantism, or early deism. We do these freethinkers a disservice if we dismiss the diverse and original ideas expressed in their Christian Epicurean and anti-Epicurean works as mere veils over a comfortably proto-modern rationalism. Rather than taking a step forward on a triumphant path leading inevitably toward modernity, these Renaissance radicals took many steps in many directions, breaking new and fruitful ground in philosophy and theology. Epicureanism galvanized their explorations, but the majority of them treated Epicurus more as an antagonist or gadfly than a teacher, with results just as fruitful as if they had embraced him.

Church authorities' primary concerns when policing intellectuals continued to be misuse of magic, Aristotle, Averroes, and, after 1517, a palette of multiplying Protestantisms, but authorities did see Epicureanism as a threat to a very different kind of reader: the lay vernacular public. As early as 1512 Albertus Pius, in the first annotated Lucretius, had warned

that he wanted the work to be read only by the learned and those who seek learning, not by youths, or lovers of sex and revelry, who would find in Lucretius “only a weight.”<sup>52</sup> In one sense this is a warning to his audience that Lucretius’s difficult verses, with his own bulky commentary, will disappoint anyone who expects an Epicurean poet to provide hedonist delights, but the word *weight* also implies sin, and the danger of dragging down the soul. Later sixteenth-century editors repeatedly affirm that the Epicurean “errors” in the *De rerum natura* pose no danger to the learned reader, who will see through their obvious falseness, but might confuse and entangle the unlearned reader, with dangerous results. Hubert van Giffen, in marketing his 1564–65 edition intended for classroom use, argued that it is important to teach Lucretius formally so that youths encounter Epicurean ideas for the first time with a teacher to help them see their falseness, rather than alone where they might be misled.<sup>53</sup> The Florentine Council’s 1517 ban on teaching Lucretius focused on danger to the youth, not criticizing any theological content of the poem but lumping Lucretius in with “licentious” works likely to corrupt young readers—an anxiety which reflects the sexual content of Book 4, the broad association of Epicureanism and heterodoxy with sodomy and hedonism, and, possibly, the notorious sexual reputation of Francheschi, whose 1505 Latin paraphrases had threatened, for the first time, to make Lucretian ideas easy for even a beginner Latinist to access.

As the Roman Inquisition’s activities ramped up in the sixteenth century, in response to the Reformation and the exponentially multiplying printing press, its policies consistently differentiated the regulation of elites from that of broader readers. The work of Hannah Marcus on the Inquisitional licensing process has demonstrated that doctors, scholars, monks, and other learned readers could apply for and regularly receive permission to read a variety of banned authors, especially works like Pliny’s *Natural Histories*, which were favorite sources on medicine and natural philosophy but banned from public circulation lest their comments on the soul confuse the unwary.<sup>54</sup> Such policies show that the Roman Inquisition did not aim to destroy information. Rather it aimed to curate access, creating concentric circles of readers, in which increasingly select elites were trusted with increasingly feared works. This drive to curate access explains why the vernacular circulation of Lucretius started so late. The first Italian translation of the *De rerum natura*—now lost—was undertaken by

Gianfrancesco Muscettola in 1530, but he did not even endeavor to publish it.<sup>55</sup> When Alessandro Marchetti completed his 1669 Italian verse translation, Duke Cosimo III of Florence (1642–1723) denied him permission to publish it, even though twenty-three years earlier the 1647 Latin edition by physician Giovanni Nardi (1585–1654), *Paraphrastica explanatio*, accompanied by supplementary discussions of the plague and Egyptian burial practices, had been printed in 1647 in Florence with Ducal permission—the first Lucretius printed in Italy since the 1517 Florentine ban. A Latin edition for learned doctors was acceptable, but not the vernacular. Manuscripts of Marchetti’s verse translation nonetheless circulated widely, and in 1717, three years after Marchetti’s death, his translation appeared in a printed edition with *Londra* (London) as the publication location listed on the title page, certainly a clandestine Italian product. When a printed version of Marchetti’s translation threatened to place Epicurean ideas in the hands of hundreds of unsupervised vernacular readers, Inquisitors finally added Lucretius to the *Index* of prohibited authors. Epicurean denial of soul, prayer, and providence had been allowed to circulate freely for three full centuries so long as they remained in the hands of Latin-readers, whose education would inoculate them against error, but a vernacular Lucretius was too dangerous.<sup>56</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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But Lucretius and Epicurus were impious. What of it? Does it then follow that we, who read them, are impious? First, how many things are there in this poem, especially the ideas and theorems of other philosophers, which are delightful? How many plausible? How many outstanding, and almost divine? These let us claim, these let us take hold of, these let us appropriate for ourselves.

Denys Lambin, introduction to *De rerum natura* f. 3<sup>v</sup>, 1563

The diffusion of Epicureanism in the Renaissance was much like the diffusion of the printing press: exponential and therefore, in its early stages, slow. It is easy to think of Aurispa and Poggio returning from their travels and rushing copies of Diogenes Laertius and Lucretius to every library, just as it is easy to think of Gutenberg pulling the first printed sheet off of his press and booksellers immediately opening their doors in London and

Amsterdam. Instead, the diffusion of ideas and technologies required time, and adaptation. Gutenberg printed a few texts, the neighbors and apprentices who copied his press printed a few more, those who copied theirs a few more, so production doubled and quadrupled, not overnight, but over years, slowed by such challenges as paper shortages and lack of distribution mechanisms for the new mass-produced commodity. Cicero's dialogues might find thousands of eager buyers across Europe, but very few in any given town. The old exponential-growth puzzle, in which one places a penny on the first square of a chessboard, two on the second, four on the third, eight on the fourth and so on does amount to quadrillions by the final squares, but by half-way across the board the dollar amounts are still in the modest millions. Similarly, presses had saturated Europe by 1700, but even in 1600 the print industry was still young and transforming, developing new ways—book fairs, newssheets, subscriptions—to reach new audiences.

Just so the texts themselves. The Epicureanism which the Renaissance bequeathed to later centuries was clear, easy to digest, ubiquitous on the shelves of every library and wealthy reader. But it had only reached that state through the lifetimes of loving labor which had made garbled manuscripts legible, broken verses complete, unknown vocabulary interpretable, transformed dense Greek into easy Latin and vernaculars, and glossed alien ideas in the light of orthodox and Aristotelian corrections. In the early 1400s it had been the desperate humanist hope that peace and political safety lay in the lost pages of the ancients which sent Poggio trekking to distant libraries, and financed Aurispa's voyage to Constantinople. Thus the first audience of recovered Epicureanism was a tiny community of expert philologists and their elite patrons, invested in the project of virtue politics. They welcomed Epicurean moral philosophy as a missing puzzle piece of the Roman virtue which had made antiquity so golden, but had very little interest in atomism or other more radical Epicurean ideas, and looted texts primarily for biographical and cultural information and Latin eloquence. Yet their manuscripts, corrections, and translations out of Greek preserved and opened up texts, which printers and commentators further opened up by making them penetrable, first to less-expert Latinists, then even to vernacular audiences. As scholars began to publish responses to Epicurus, most of them were attacks, or extreme modifications seeking to make the desirable parts of Epicureanism compatible with orthodox science and religion. Thus radical Epicurean

ideas were multiplied by scholars who were not interested in them, further propagated by others who actively opposed them, and even protected by censors who felt that dangerous ideas should be shared with scholars, not banned completely, since that would only make their circulation unsupervised and dangerous. Sympathetic audiences, those excited by Epicurean materialism, atomism, and ethics independent of divinity, were always present but comprised only a sliver of the whole, a sliver which expanded as the whole expanded in the late sixteenth century, as easy classroom editions increased Epicurean readership exponentially.

Yet even in the later Renaissance, for every scholar who welcomed and fruitfully integrated Epicurean ideas, there were many others who opposed them just as fruitfully. Scientific poets like Maurice Scève (c. 1500–c. 1560) and Robert Burton (1577–1640) imitated Lucretius’s form by writing scientific verses while rejecting atomism wholesale. Seventeenth-century French libertines such as Cyrano de Bergerac (1619–55) adapted Epicurean pleasure-centered ethics into precisely the sort of hedonism Lucretius and Epicurus rejected. Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Walter Raleigh (c. 1554–1618), Margaret Cavendish (1623–73), Henry Percy Earl of Northumberland (1564–1632) and his associates such as Thomas Hariot (1560–1621) and Robert Hues (1553–1632), even Giordano Bruno’s defender Nicholas Hill (1570–c. 1610), who published his *Philosophia Epicurea* in 1601, and the atomist physician Walter Charleton (1619–1707), who translated Gassendi and published his own *Epicurus’ Morals* in 1656—all these interlocutors repurposed pieces of Epicureanism in increasingly disparate contexts, sometimes political, sometimes scientific, sometimes moral, sometimes fiercely theological. When eighteenth-century *philosophes* such as Voltaire (1694–1778) and Baron d’Holbach (1723–89) studied Epicureanism, their Enlightenment rationalism was not the sole, triumphant outcome of Epicurus’s return, but one of many dozens of fruits born from the tree that patient humanists had nurtured in the courts of Italy.<sup>57</sup>

Humanists had hoped their efforts would yield crops of Ciceros and Senecas, Trajans and Hadrians, to drive back War who raged, alongside Death, Famine, and Pestilence, with such apocalyptic vigor through the teetering city-states of Petrarch’s Italy. They failed. The French Invasion, the Italian Wars, the Reformation—War grew stronger. But humanist labors yielded other fruits, among them the physician Girolamo Fracastoro (c.

1476–1553) whose epic poem *Syphilis sive morbus gallicus* (1530) used atomism, materialism, and Lucretian language to advance, for the first time, the revolutionary contagion theory of disease. Pestilence was not the foe Petrarch—who lost so many friends to it—had expected to battle, nor had Lucretius hoped to battle it, only the fear of it, but both would have been overjoyed, if also surprised, to see such a powerful weapon for the defense of human happiness arise from their contributions to the commixing seeds of things.

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<sup>1</sup> "Alexander the Oracle Monger" in Fowler and Fowler, *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*.

<sup>2</sup> Butterfield, "Lucretius in the Early Modern Period," 45–68.

<sup>3</sup> Creech, T. *Lucretius Carus, of the Nature of Things, in Six Books*, 819.

<sup>4</sup> Hankins, "The Virtue Politics of the Italian Humanists"; *Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy*.

<sup>5</sup> Hunter and Wootton, *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, esp. 25, 57; Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 28–32.

<sup>6</sup> Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance*, 36–58.

<sup>7</sup> Ovid *Amores* 1.15.23–24; Cicero *Epist. ad Q. fr.* 14.2.9; Quintilian 10.1.87; Donatus *Vita Virg.* 6; Eusebius-Jerome *Chronicon* a. Abr. 1923–24, 149 Helm; cf. Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*; Butterfield, *The Early Textual History of Lucretius' De Rerum Natura*. See also Allen, "The Rehabilitation of Epicurus and His Theory of Pleasure in the Early Renaissance," 1–15; Garin, "Ricerche Sull'epicureanismo Del Quattrocento."

<sup>8</sup> While the *De rerum natura* had returned to Italy as early as 1417, Valla did not have access to it, since Poggio and other humanists in Florence had exclusive access to the manuscript until the death of Niccolò Niccoli in 1437; Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 17–20; Valla, *On Pleasure = De Voluptate*.

<sup>9</sup> Gordan, *Two Renaissance Book Hunters*, 201–202.

<sup>10</sup> See *Familiares* VIII.7 (on the plague) and VIII.9 (on the bandit attack).

<sup>11</sup> Gordan, *Two Renaissance Book Hunters*, 196–7.

<sup>12</sup> Butterfield, "Lucretius in the Early Modern Period."

<sup>13</sup> Hankins and Palmer, *The Recovery of Ancient Philosophy in the Renaissance*, 62–3.

<sup>14</sup> On the transmission of Lucretius, see Reeve, "The Italian Tradition of Lucretius Revisited."

<sup>15</sup> See Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*.

<sup>16</sup> On Lucretius and art see Dempsey, "Mercurius Ver," 251–73; Campbell, "Giorgione's 'Tempest,' 'Studiolo' Culture, and the Renaissance Lucretius," 299–332; Prosperi, *Di Soavi Licor Gli Orli Del Vaso*; Lane-Spollen, *Under the Guise of Spring*.

<sup>17</sup> Davidson, "Lucretius, Atheism and Irreligion in Renaissance and Early Modern Venice."

<sup>18</sup> BAV Ottob. Lat. 2834, Naples BN IV E 51, and 1486, Utrecht Universiteitsbib. Litt. Lat. X fol. 82 rar. See Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 142–6.

<sup>19</sup> BAV Ottob. Lat. 1954, and Baltimore Walters W.383 (De Ricci 434).

<sup>20</sup> Vera, "Lucrecio En España."

<sup>21</sup> Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 147–53; Solaro, *Lucrezio*.

<sup>22</sup> Bonincontri worked in Naples (1450–75), Florence (1475–78), and Rome (1483–91), all hubs of Lucretian activity.

- <sup>23</sup> Hankins and Palmer, *The Recovery of Ancient Philosophy in the Renaissance*, 62–63.
- <sup>24</sup> Norbrook, Harrison, and Hardie, *Lucretius and the Early Modern*; De Quehen, Lucy Hutchinson's *Translation of Lucretius*, *De Rerum Natura*.
- <sup>25</sup> Brescia, 1473 f. 106. See Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 192, 325 n. 1; Beretta, *De Rerum Natura. Editio Princeps (1472–73)*.
- <sup>26</sup> Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 43–96.
- <sup>27</sup> Sherman, "What Did Renaissance Readers Write in Their Books?," 119–37.
- <sup>28</sup> Fifty-four Renaissance manuscripts of Lucretius are known, but two are in private collections and could not be included in this survey. See Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 49–50.
- <sup>29</sup> For an extended treatment of this data, see Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 47–91 especially 74, table 2.4.
- <sup>30</sup> Laur. 35.30 and 35.31.
- <sup>31</sup> Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 54–5.
- <sup>32</sup> See Palmer, "The Recovery of Stoicism in the Renaissance," 117–32.
- <sup>33</sup> Hankins, "Ficino's Critique of Lucretius."
- <sup>34</sup> Naples Naz. IV 51 f. 66<sup>r</sup> (III 417); Bodleian Cann. Lat. 32, f. 54<sup>r</sup>.
- <sup>35</sup> Munich Clm. 816a f. 27<sup>r</sup>, and Paris PN M YC 397, V95 f. d1<sup>v</sup>; see Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, fig. 22.
- <sup>36</sup> Piacenza Landi Cod. 33; Piacenza Landi Cod. 61–5 and figs. 5–14.
- <sup>37</sup> Brown, "Reinterpreting Renaissance Humanism"; *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*.
- <sup>38</sup> See Palmer, "The Use and Defense of the Classical Canon in Pomponio Leto's Biography of Lucretius," 87–106.
- <sup>39</sup> See Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 81–88.
- <sup>40</sup> Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 203–32.
- <sup>41</sup> Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, 212–21; Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*.
- <sup>42</sup> 1.936–50; see *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 70–78.
- <sup>43</sup> Creech, *T. Lucretius Carus, of the Nature of Things*, 821.
- <sup>44</sup> Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 37, 274–5 n. 108.
- <sup>45</sup> Lucy Hutchinson, *The Works of Lucy Hutchinson*, Vol. I.
- <sup>46</sup> On similar cases in which orthodox scholars inadvertently spread the very ideas they seek to attack, see Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650–1729*.
- <sup>47</sup> On reading pre-modern protestations of orthodoxy as "innocent dissimulation," and the uses and pitfalls of such a method, see David Wootton, "New Histories of Atheism," 20.
- <sup>48</sup> See Butterfield, "Contempta Relinquas," 98.
- <sup>49</sup> Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 28–30.
- <sup>50</sup> Valentina Prosperi, "Lucretius in the Italian Renaissance," 214–26.
- <sup>51</sup> Nicholas Davidson, "Lucretius, Irreligion, and Atheism in Early Modern Venice," 123–34.
- <sup>52</sup> Butterfield, "Contempta Relinquas," 98–99.
- <sup>53</sup> Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 170–72.
- <sup>54</sup> See Hannah Marcus's dissertation, *Banned Books: Medicine, Readers, and Censors in Early Modern Italy, 1559–1664*; monograph forthcoming.
- <sup>55</sup> Butterfield, "Contempta Relinquas," 99.

<sup>56</sup> Especially in response to rising anxieties about atheism in the wake of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), see Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England 1580–1720*; for broader philosophical impact, see the masterful study by Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity*.

<sup>57</sup> Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729*.

## CHAPTER 25

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# MATERIALISM AND THE EARLY MODERN “NATURAL HISTORY OF MAN”

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ANN THOMSON

## INTRODUCTION

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THE eighteenth century saw the emergence of openly atheistic and materialistic philosophies denying the existence of immaterial substance, notably in France, where the publication of Paul Thiry d'Holbach's *Système de la nature* (1770) is often accorded particular importance. The undoubted impact of this work of propaganda, which was part of a political campaign, should not however be allowed to obscure the more long-standing reflections on the nature of humans, contributing to the elaboration of a “natural history of man.” This was the attempt to explain human faculties in purely material terms without recourse to an immaterial or immortal soul to distinguish them from other animals. Such materialism, while it rejected religious teaching, was not necessarily atheistic. The inspiration for such

naturalistic views of humans was diverse, and different authors proclaimed allegiance to different predecessors. Julien Offray de La Mettrie, by the very title of his work *L'Homme machine*, linked his philosophy to that of Descartes, while Claude-Andrien Helvétius is usually placed in the tradition of Lockean sensualism. In fact, all these writers built on debates conducted in a large number of philosophical, theological, and scientific works over a long period, and drawing on diverse inspirations. Attention has frequently been drawn to the contribution of Epicureanism to this debate.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will look at this contribution, mainly in Britain and France where the discussion was arguably the most extensive and important.<sup>2</sup>

In the early modern period, Epicureanism was frequently seen to be the philosophy behind all heterodox opinions concerning God and the human soul. The essence of the Epicurean system in this perspective was of course its materialism: the claim that there is nothing beyond eternally existing matter composed of moving atoms, the accidental meeting of which produced the world. All phenomena, including sensitivity and human intelligence, can therefore be explained in terms of the movement of atoms with no presiding intelligence or plan. Hence the accusation most frequently made against early modern systems that appeared to run the risk of favoring materialism, whether or not they denied the existence of God, was that of Epicureanism. The Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth lumped together Epicureanism with the “mongrel philosophy” of Leucippus, Democritus, and Protagoras as the only “entire and coherent” atheistic system,<sup>3</sup> and it is interesting to note that Spinoza was rapidly labeled an Epicurean atheist by several critics.<sup>4</sup> Epicureanism became a blanket term of abuse for all those who questioned doctrines such as the existence of an immortal, immaterial soul specific to humans, whether or not they favored Epicurean doctrines. One might even say that atheistic Epicureanism was the ghost haunting attempts to explain the human being in the early modern period. Catherine Wilson claims that it was Epicureanism that dismantled the Christian-Aristotelian synthesis, and that “were it not for the revival of Epicureanism, materialism could not have had the force it did amongst the *philosophes*.”<sup>5</sup>

However, several historians of philosophy have contradicted the view that Epicureanism was considered offensive in the seventeenth century<sup>6</sup> and have insisted on the generally positive reception of Epicureanism.<sup>7</sup> Margaret Osler has argued that the mechanical philosophers hoped, by

banishing all activity from matter, to guarantee the place of God as the provider of the necessary motive force and thus to constitute a bulwark against atheism.<sup>8</sup> Partly for this reason, the precise role of Epicureanism in early modern materialistic theories of humans, or what in the eighteenth century came to be called “the natural history of man,” is relatively complex, and the role of Epicurean reflections on the nature of humans and their relation to animals in this period has been the subject of varying interpretations. On the one hand, there were attempts to elaborate a Christianized atomism, whose role in this process is difficult to evaluate precisely; there are, in particular, conflicting interpretations of the philosophy of Pierre Gassendi, who played a crucial role in the revival of atomism. On the other, the status of Epicureanism in openly materialistic explanations of humans is complex, as those who had recourse to aspects of Epicurean philosophy usually incorporated extraneous elements in order to produce a convincing hypothesis, and these elements changed over the period and from author to author. Epicureanism continued to be an important presence in the eighteenth century, when it combined with “Spinozism” and other traditions.

In what follows, we shall look first at the main vectors of Epicurean materialism and the difficulties entailed by attempts to provide a convincing naturalistic explanation of human beings on Epicurean principles. This will lead on to a study of the principal attempts to solve these problems made by the most significant thinkers in the early modern period, who looked to the Epicurean tradition when attempting to account for human activity in purely material terms. As we shall see, the main issue concerned the activity of matter, which was linked to discussions of human and animal souls and theories of animal generation.

## THE PROPERTIES OF ATOMS

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The revival of interest in ancient atomism in the early modern period has been well documented and discussed. However, several scholars have also emphasized the continuity of a scientific tradition of atomism<sup>9</sup> as well as of an irreligious tradition drawing on Epicurean and other themes. This irreligious tradition contributed to the thought of the seventeenth-century



writers generally grouped under the label of “libertins,”<sup>10</sup> characterized by a naturalism in which there was no place for an immortal soul.<sup>11</sup> While the writings of Lucilio Vanini, Pierre Charon, or François La Mothe Le Vayer played a role in irreligious works well into the following century, in discussions of human nature, the relations of humans to other animals, and the existence of the soul, the works of Gassendi were more crucial. His Christianized adaptation of Epicureanism and the popularization of his philosophy by François Bernier’s exposition in French<sup>12</sup> played an important role in such debates. According to Margaret Osler, Gassendi introduced Epicurean philosophy into the mainstream of European thought.<sup>13</sup> The precise convictions of Gassendi himself have led to disagreement amongst scholars. While his desire to reconcile ancient atomism with Christian doctrine is clear, there is no consensus concerning his real piety and the extent to which his defense of religion might have been merely a cover for hidden irreligious tendencies. For some, his complex philosophy retains a tension between materialistic conclusions and Christian belief, while for others his system did indeed Christianize atomism. Margaret Osler, who sees his theological views as underlying his philosophy, has criticized a tradition following René Pintard, which viewed him as a “libertin” and Alan Kors quotes several contemporaries who emphasized Gassendi’s piety.<sup>14</sup> For Olivier Bloch, Gassendi developed the two incompatible aspects of his philosophy without reconciling them, and while not doubting his sincere faith Bloch sees it as less important and believes that, despite himself, the main thrust of Gassendi’s philosophy was materialist.<sup>15</sup> In connection with this controversy it is interesting to note a published letter written by Gassendi’s follower François Bernier, dated from Persia in 1668. In this letter to his friend La Chapelle, in which Bernier discusses the main tenets of atomism, he insists that matter cannot account for human intelligence, and emphasizes the need for divine intervention and the existence of an immaterial soul.<sup>16</sup>

Whatever position one adopts on this point, there is no doubt of Gassendi’s importance in popularizing aspects of Epicurean philosophy, including amongst those who did not share his religious position. The main aspects of Gassendi’s philosophy that played a role in materialistic accounts of humans were, on the one hand, his conception of animal soul and the identification of the corporeal soul with the principle of life, and on the

other, his discussion of the properties of the atom. Scholars have pointed out the importance of the question of the faculties of the material corporeal soul, on which as we shall see several thinkers adopted Gassendi's view. One should not however overlook the importance of his suggestion that atoms possess an inherent impulse or inclination to motion, and his discussion of the problem of how to account for the mobility of atoms of matter.<sup>17</sup> There is disagreement among scholars concerning Gassendi's view of the properties of the atom, and the extent to which he does indeed posit the activity of matter and thus runs the danger of providing support for materialism. Antonia Lolordo has argued, contrary to Margaret Osler, that active matter was necessary for Gassendi in order to preserve religion and that at the period when he was writing there appears to have been no fear that allowing activity to creation would lead to atheism. According to Lolordo, the dangers of such a position only appeared acutely later in the century.<sup>18</sup> Certainly by the 1650s Boyle's criticism of Epicurean atomism centered on the rejection of the activity of matter.<sup>19</sup>

Gassendi's account of the properties of atoms played a role in his discussion of animal reproduction, which attempts to provide what has been called a broadly materialistic atomistic account of generation, involving the seminal principle that directs embryonic development.<sup>20</sup> His theory of "semina" (seed) posits a particular type of molecule or group of atoms endowed with formative power formed from all parts of the bodies of both men and women, containing a small soul or flame. It is used to explain the generation of minerals as well as animals and plants, to explain apparent spontaneous generation, and also to provide a naturalistic account of the transmission of characteristics from parents to children. However the origin of this power is not clear and Gassendi insists on the limits of our knowledge of God's operations. His theory has received differing interpretations from scholars, for example concerning the extent to which Gassendi adopts preformation. François Duchesneau has emphasized the tensions and ambiguities in Gassendi's theory, which he sees as containing two distinct mechanical models, one based on Epicurean materialism, the other reducing the role of chance by frequent recourse to teleology.<sup>21</sup> As we shall see, reproduction continued to pose problems for materialistic accounts of humans within a mechanistic Epicurean framework, and these

problems were linked to the question of the properties of the eternally moving atoms, on which interpretations differed.

The importance of Gassendi's writings in contributing to the spread of Epicurean philosophy has already been mentioned. His own contacts with the exiled English royalist circle around the Cavendishes in Paris played a role in this influence. In particular, the meeting in 1641 between Hobbes and Gassendi had an impact on the philosophy of both men, as has been shown.<sup>22</sup> It was probably through this circle that Epicureanism came to play an important role in England in the seventeenth century, although Stephen Clucas has criticized the emphasis on Gassendi's influence. He claims instead that there was a separate tradition of English atomism which differed in several ways from Gassendi's views and incorporated other elements. As he shows, atomistic matter theory is frequently combined with non-mechanical elements and it is rare to find Epicureanism unmixed with other traditions.<sup>23</sup>

One should also not forget the important role played by Ralph Cudworth in defending ancient atomism. He rehabilitated it by distinguishing it from atheistic mechanism, represented among the ancients by Protagoras in particular and by Hobbes among the moderns.<sup>24</sup> To claim that the chance collisions of atoms could produce everything that exists led in his view to atheism. For Cudworth, on the contrary, anyone who understands correctly "Atomick Physiology" "must acknowledge *Incorporeal Substances*; which is the Absolute Overthrow of Atheism."<sup>25</sup> Thus, while defending what he saw as Descartes's revival of ancient atomism, he condemned "that monstrous dotage and sottishness of Epicurus, and some other spurious pretenders to this atomical philosophy," who made the absurd and contradictory claim that mere corporeal atoms could produce thought.<sup>26</sup> He also distinguished the atomist from the atheistic "Hylozoick Corporealist," who believed that matter has life and that nothing else exists. For Cudworth a hylozoist, unlike an atomist, is necessarily an atheist, and hylozoism is closely linked to corporealism, because if matter possesses self-active power and sensibility, it can also possess reason and understanding. This will remove the need "either of an Incorporeal Immortal Soul in Men, or a Deity in the Universe."<sup>27</sup> Cudworth's discussion of atomism and his solution to the question of how to account for feeling and intelligence, in the form of plastic natures, were to play a role in the following century in

France, mainly thanks to the extensive summary in French of the *True Intellectual System of the Universe* published by the Arminian theologian Jean Le Clerc in the first issues of his periodical *Bibliothèque choisie* in 1703–1704.<sup>28</sup>

Cudworth's main target in his attack on atheistic Epicureanism was of course Hobbes,<sup>29</sup> who could in many ways be said to be the figure haunting the Cambridge Platonists' writings and contemporary fears of atheism.<sup>30</sup> Henry More's 1659 work *The Immortality of the Soul* was directed against Hobbes, whose corporeal mechanism was given the label of materialist by Henry More, a term possibly invented by More for the purpose.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in the late seventeenth century the first Boyle lecturer, Richard Bentley, directed his refutation of atheism against the arch-Epicurean, Thomas Hobbes.<sup>32</sup> Subsequent lecturers in this series, set up in accordance with the terms of Robert Boyle's will to defend Christian doctrines, particularly targeted Epicureans and "Hobbits." The presentation of Hobbes's philosophy as Epicurean is in many ways a distortion, as has been frequently pointed out, but despite Hobbes's refusal of the void and lack of recourse to atomistic explanations, an affinity with certain Epicurean themes, mediated through Lucretius, cannot be denied. His basic materialistic outlook is shared with Epicureanism, whatever the undoubted differences in specific theories or science.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, it is in many ways particularly appropriate to take Hobbes's explanations in terms of matter and motion as a starting-point for the question of Epicurean materialism. The basic criticisms made of Epicurean philosophy, as of Hobbism, continued to center on the question of how matter and motion could account for thought, and led to attempts to introduce other explanatory mechanisms which could be combined to provide a naturalistic explanation of humans in material terms.

The case of Margaret Cavendish is here particularly interesting. She developed a materialistic system initially based on Epicurean philosophy, which she expounded in the texts she wrote in 1653; indeed it has been claimed that this was what pushed Walter Charleton and others to develop a Christianized form of Epicureanism.<sup>34</sup> However, in her later writings she rejected certain basic Epicurean tenets including atoms and the chance origin of the universe, and insisted that matter possessed life and feeling. She wrote:

I shall never be able to conceive how, senseless and irrational atoms can produce sense and reason, or a sensible and rational body, such as the soul is: although he [Epicurus] affirms it to be possible.<sup>35</sup>

The problem for those who opposed Aristotelian theories of human beings was indeed how to provide a convincing alternative account of life, feeling, and in particular thought. As Pierre Bayle wrote: “man is the most difficult morsel to digest for all systems. He is the stumbling-block of truth and falsehood ... .”<sup>36</sup> Margaret Osler has pointed out that the abandoning of Aristotelian forms meant that matter was seen as free-standing, which entailed the problem of how to explain phenomena.<sup>37</sup> Thus the nonconformist English divine Richard Baxter criticized Epicurus and Descartes for reducing all phenomena to matter and local motion. In the Appendix to *The Reasons of Christian Religion* (1667), in which he defended the immortality of the soul against “the Somatists or Epicureans, and other Pseudo-Philosophers,” with frequent recourse to Gassendi, Baxter particularly condemned the Epicurean hypothesis (which he equated with that of Descartes) for reducing everything to matter and motion. He pointed out that those who adopted this philosophy needed a God as the first cause.<sup>38</sup> He even went as far, in his later dispute with Henry More, as to claim that there was no contradiction in the notion of perceptive matter and that God could make “perceptive living matter.”<sup>39</sup>

The difficulty of accounting for feeling and thought was explored in detail by Pierre Bayle in his influential writings on atomistic philosophy. He argued on several occasions that the main objection to which such theories were open was in relation to the soul, as it was difficult to imagine how the soul could be explained on the basis of a system of insensitive atoms. As he emphasized in various articles in his *Dictionary*, the only solution open to atomists was to suppose each atom endowed with life and feeling, as they would not then be vulnerable to the objection made against endowing matter with thought, namely that it is divisible: “if every atom had a soul and sensation, we might easily conceive how a combination of atoms should make a compound capable of certain particular modifications, as well with respect to consciousness and sensation, as with respect to motion.”<sup>40</sup> After all, he remarked, it is no more difficult to conceive of atoms as sensitive than it is to conceive of them as possessing innate motion as the Epicureans claim. Both claims were of course inconceivable for

Bayle. He pointed out that this was Democritus's position, abandoned by Epicurus despite the fact that it allowed atomists to explain how different arrangements of atoms could form "divers sorts of creatures, divers senses, and divers thoughts," and thus avoid being exposed to the "thundering objection" of those critics who argued that if one atom could not feel, then no juxtaposition of several atoms would be able to.<sup>41</sup> Here Bayle, as so often, put his finger on one of the basic problems for the elaboration of a coherent materialistic view of humans in the early modern period, one which, as we shall see, continued to dog thinkers.

Gianni Paganini has discussed this question at some length, and pointed out the importance of Bayle's discussions for the development of eighteenth-century materialism. He shows that Bayle moved from an emphasis on the Epicurean as the representative of a coherent materialist philosophy, for the reasons expounded in the article on "Epicure," to a concentration on the Stratonist atheist, whose dynamic view of matter could account for the creation of animals and sentient beings without divine intervention.<sup>42</sup> This emphasis on the atheistic philosophy of Strato of Lampsacus, who attributed life to matter, is in evidence in the *Continuation des pensées diverses*. This work includes Bayle's dispute with the Arminian theologian and journalist Jean Le Clerc over "plastick natures." This increasingly virulent dispute followed from Le Clerc's favorable discussion of Cudworth's philosophy in the first issues of his *Bibliothèque choisie*. One of the vital issues here was the question of how to account for feeling and intelligence.<sup>43</sup> For Bayle, Cudworth's theory removed a potent argument against the atheists, whether Epicurean or Stratonist, concerning the need for an immaterial intelligent creator in order to account for the formation of animals. Only the Cartesian system, which posited the need for God to accord motive force to matter, could answer the atheists, because once one admitted such a force in any type of matter, or in Cudworth's "plastick nature," the argument in favor of a divine creator was fatally undermined. He seems to be likening Cudworth's philosophy to Stratonism.<sup>44</sup> Of course the precise interpretation of Bayle's aim is, as always, open to dispute, but there is no doubt of his importance in pointing out the problems; this also shows the role played by seventeenth-century English theological reflection in the importance accorded to atomistic arguments.



Bayle's solution of according sentience to atoms removed the problem of making divisible matter the subject of thought.<sup>45</sup> He compared this sentient atom to the monads of Leibniz, who developed his theory during the same years. Indeed several critics have pointed out the connection between Bayle's discussion and the way Leibniz reworked Cudworth.<sup>46</sup> In some ways, indeed, Leibniz's monads could be compared to the sentient atoms proposed by Bayle, and Catherine Wilson has characterized Leibniz's philosophy as "an alter-Epicurean system."<sup>47</sup> Leibniz's abandoning of his youthful sympathy for atomism was linked to his rejection of the void and his conviction that there could be no material atoms, as all material things were infinitely divisible. Stuart Brown quotes his reply to Bayle who had compared monads to Epicurean atoms, in which Leibniz claimed to regard monads as "atoms of substance."<sup>48</sup> Bayle's remarks and Leibniz's reaction show the limitations of Epicurean mechanical philosophy for the development of a coherent materialistic theory of animate beings in an age of new discoveries in biology and medicine. They help to explain why Epicurean mechanism alone was insufficient to provide a view of matter that could form the basis for an account of humans and other animals.

In this process of adapting Epicurean atomism with the addition of extraneous elements, the role of medical thought was important, and here too the influence of Gassendi was significant. In England, where his works circulated rapidly among scientists,<sup>49</sup> physician Walter Charleton played a notable role in the diffusion of Gassendi's thought. Charleton had studied with William Harvey in Oxford in the mid-1640s and later adopted Gassendi's Epicurean philosophy under the influence of the Cavendish circle. He expounded what was essentially Gassendi's philosophy in his *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charletoniana* in 1654. Among the atheistic "dross" of Epicureanism that must be rejected according to him was the claim "that Atoms were Eternally existent in the infinite space" and "that their Motive Faculty was eternally inhaerent in them, and not derived by impression from any External Principle."<sup>50</sup> Like Gassendi, he claimed there was no problem in endowing atoms with their own innate motive power, provided one stipulated that it was communicated to them by God at their first creation. Thus, according to one critic, he "was constrained to admit some vitalistic elements into his system."<sup>51</sup> For Charleton, as for Harvey, the blood, while material, does seem to possess innate vital qualities and the



precise status of the incorporeal substance of the soul seems unclear.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, in *The Natural History of Nutrition, of Life and Voluntary Motion* (1659), in which Charleton adopted Gassendi's account of animal generation, he attributed both activity and sensation to matter, claiming that "all parts of the body have a certain Naturall sense or feeling, distinct from the Animal, and wholly independent upon the brain."<sup>53</sup> Such views probably betray the earlier influence of Van Helmont as well as that of the writings of the Cambridge physician Francis Glisson, whose descriptions of "energetic" matter played an important role in vitalistic medical theories.<sup>54</sup> They indicate the type of thinking that was frequently combined with Epicurean mechanism and, as we shall see, was often later used to elaborate a materialistic view of humans.

## DEBATES ON THE SOUL

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Charleton draws in some of his later works on the writings of another Christian Epicurean medical doctor, who had apparently in turn used Charleton's account of the sensitive soul drawn from Gassendi.<sup>55</sup> Thomas Willis, appointed professor of Natural philosophy at Oxford at the Restoration, defended the new science against the Aristotelian tradition, and adopted Gassendi's atomism, combining Epicureanism with aspects of chemical doctrine.<sup>56</sup> The influence of Gassendi is evident in *De anima brutorum* (1672),<sup>57</sup> which discusses the nature and function of the animal spirits distributed by the nerves (generally called the sensitive soul but which Willis called the "Lucid or Etherial soul"),<sup>58</sup> and the separate vital soul. This dual material soul explains all animal functions except human reason, produced by the immaterial rational soul. The corporeal soul, distributed throughout the body and capable of perceiving, learning, and forming certain judgments,<sup>59</sup> is transmitted in the seminal fluid and creates a new being, by "kindling" the matter to form the body. For Willis, the atoms composing all material objects are active, self-moving, and capable of sensation, and the only difference between an insensitive and a sensitive body is that which is between "a thing unkindled, and a thing kindled."<sup>60</sup> The dangers inherent in thus according activity, life, and sensitivity to

matter were increasingly obvious, and Willis's appeal to those who wished to dispense with an immaterial soul altogether and provide a purely material explanation of human functions was reinforced by his work on the brain. The results of his research program on the brain, which constituted his primary contribution to medical history, were first published in *Cerebri anatome* (1664) and further developed in *De anima brutorum*.<sup>61</sup> Here he explained in detail sensation, perception, imagination, and memory, attempting to localize these functions in different parts of the brain.<sup>62</sup> Willis also insisted on the similarity of human and animal brains and did seem at times to be saying that the different capacities of humans were accounted for by a different organization.<sup>63</sup> Thus his writings could be used by those materialists who wished to explain intellectual functions of humans by the workings of the brain,<sup>64</sup> whether or not they adopted the Epicurean view of a material soul derived from Gassendi. Roselyne Rey has shown how Gassendi's influence reached the vitalistic medical school associated in the eighteenth century with Montpellier University—which played a role in Diderot's materialism—through English writers such as Willis.<sup>65</sup>

Another medical writer who was a vector for Epicurean materialism in the same period was the French physician Guillaume Lamy. Although a member of the Paris Medical Faculty, he is a minor figure in medical history compared to the distinguished Willis, but he did take part in several high-profile medical disputes.<sup>66</sup> His works subordinate medical explanations to philosophical principles, namely the refusal of any but mechanical explanations, rejecting what he considered to be hypotheses unsupported by evidence. In *De principiis rerum. Liber tres* (1669) he discussed different systems, coming down firmly on the side of the Epicurean system and, despite denying it to be contrary to Christian faith, he espoused the irreligious aspects of this philosophy that others did not, namely anti-finalism and the explanation of the world's origin by chance encounters of atoms.<sup>67</sup> Lamy described human anatomy and the functioning of the brain in two works. In the public anatomy lectures published as *Discours anatomiques* (1675), he claimed that the different parts of the body are produced purely by matter and motion, without intentionality or purpose, due to a necessity inherent in the nature of the atoms composing them, and that their functions follow from their existence.<sup>68</sup> While Lamy generally adopts Cartesian physiology, particularly in his description of the

circulation of the blood, Willis's influence is evident in the description of the brain in the sixth lecture, which largely follows *Cerebri anatome*. However, while adopting Willis's view that the animal spirits or material animal soul are responsible for movement and sensibility, Lamy clearly implies that the animal spirits (which, like Willis, he compares to rays of light in the nerves)<sup>69</sup> are the same as the human soul. He also adopts the Stoic view concerning a material soul of the world, described as a very subtle spirit or a fine and always mobile matter whose source is in the sun, a fire without flame which, when associated with a particular organization of organs and mixture of humors, feels and perceives.<sup>70</sup> Lamy's works show how mechanistic physiology linked to Epicurean philosophy could draw on the writings of both Descartes and Willis in order to provide a materialistic explanation of humans. But although his works did not contribute greatly to organicist explanations, their influence on certain irreligious French eighteenth-century texts is well documented, despite disagreement among scholars as to his true beliefs.<sup>71</sup> His passage concerning the material soul is reproduced in several of such irreligious works, which combine Epicurean and Stoic conceptions of the soul.<sup>72</sup>

A similar combination of Epicurean and Stoic conceptions of a material soul is found in the late seventeenth-century works of Charles Blount, the first "English deist," infamous both for his radical ideas and denunciation of "priestcraft" and for his suicide. In *Anima mundi*, first published in 1679, he reviews ancient opinions on the soul, a favorite tactic of irreligious thinkers.<sup>73</sup> He expounds the theories of both the Epicurean material soul and the Stoic "soul of the world" positing the existence of two eternal substances, mind and body. While he does not come down clearly in favor of one particular opinion, his presentation of the reasons for belief in the soul's immortality is continually undermined by emphasis on the different opinions of those who doubted it and on the difficulty of deciding.<sup>74</sup> The main themes developed in Blount's works are Epicurean and Stoic and, despite a strong influence of both Hobbes and Spinoza, Epicureanism is described as the chief philosophy denying the existence of an immaterial, immortal soul.<sup>75</sup> This is certainly how it continued to be viewed in Britain, as can be seen from the continuing polemic on the nature of the soul in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the large number of attacks on Epicurean and Hobbesian atheists and the probable existence of heterodox opinions on the soul, the number of those who openly denied the existence of an immaterial soul in print was relatively small. Nevertheless, their works caused a major polemic which seems to have outstripped their real influence, while at the same time indicating the extent of heterodox speculation. The refusal of an immaterial soul was part of a long-standing Christian tradition, which claimed that the doctrine of a separate immaterial and immortal soul was a pagan import into Christian doctrine and that to deny that it was possible for matter to think was to undermine divine omnipotence. Such heretical Christians believed either that the soul died with the body, to be resurrected at the Last Judgment, or that it slept until then. Those who defended such positions (generally called mortalists) in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were immediately accused of adopting Epicurean philosophy. When the aged Henry Layton wrote a pamphlet arguing against the existence of an immaterial soul in reply to Richard Bentley's 1691 Boyle Lecture on the theme that matter and motion cannot think, he was naturally seen to be adopting Hobbesian and Epicurean philosophy. One of the most consistent critics of the Christian mortalists commented on Layton's work: "you have here such a medly of Epicurean dreams and Christian doctrines mixt together, as is not commonly met with," and went on to refer to Epicurean views of a material soul by quoting from Diogenes Laertius, Gassendi, and Hobbes.<sup>77</sup> Layton, who was by all accounts a very devout man with no thoughts of undermining religion, had to some extent encouraged such criticisms by comparing the human soul to Gassendi's fiery animal soul and referring to the material Epicurean soul.<sup>78</sup> It is interesting to note that Layton's espousal of such theories was at least in part the result of reading Willis's *De anima brutorum*.

The most determined onslaught on doctrine of the immaterial soul in the early years of the eighteenth century came from a medical doctor, William Coward, in a series of works drawing on both theological and medical arguments, beginning in 1702 with *Second Thoughts on Human Soul*.<sup>79</sup> He was likewise accused of Epicurean atheism,<sup>80</sup> and in 1704 two of his works were condemned by the House of Commons to be burnt by the common hangman. One author claimed that any attempt to explain the workings of the soul by matter and movement constituted "a direct road to atheism or at

least to entertain such gross conceptions of a deity as the Epicureans have, and conclude with them that the world was made by a fortuitous concourse of atoms ... .”<sup>81</sup> In reply to such accusations, Coward denied that he had taken any notions from “Epicurus, Gassendus or Mr Hobbs” and claimed to have only a passing and ancient acquaintance with Hobbes’s works.<sup>82</sup> His materialism was clearly influenced by his medical studies and by the chemical works of Willis, and he seems to prefer the “atomical philosophy” to Aristotelianism.<sup>83</sup> He did not however adopt the idea of a material soul, preferring to explain thought in terms of the workings of the brain. He was apparently more concerned with the question of vital matter, in which connection he refers to the theories of Glisson concerning sentient matter.<sup>84</sup> It is perhaps significant that he did not draw on Willis’s works on the brain or animal soul.

The other high-profile participant in this debate was John Toland, who gave it a more clearly irreligious tonality in his *Letters to Serena* (1704). Despite certain Epicurean overtones, in this work he specifically rejected the Epicurean doctrines of the vacuum and the chance origin of the world.<sup>85</sup> Crucially, he claimed that motion was essential to matter, insisting that he meant not merely local motion but inherent motive force or internal energy.<sup>86</sup> Those who most openly denied a separate immaterial soul and attempted to provide a material explanation of humans in England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were thus far from claiming that the chance encounters of atoms could produce thought, and instead were particularly concerned with the question of matter and its inherent life and with reducing the radical distinction between humans and other animals.<sup>87</sup> The crucial step was to go beyond the affirmation of an eternally mobile matter to the claim that matter is living and sentient. But it is also clear that despite this, the very denial of an immaterial soul was considered to be part of an Epicurean tradition.

From this point of view it is interesting to note the reaction of the Newtonian mathematician Joseph Raphson, whose assimilation of God to space was analyzed by Toland in the fifth of his *Letters to Serena*. In *De Deo*, published in 1710, Raphson included a series of letters, the first of which provides a detailed comparison of William Coward’s theories with those of Lucretius, reproducing in parallel columns passages from the two writers concerning mainly matter’s power to move itself and the way the

material animal spirits produce thought. Raphson even quotes approvingly Coward's claim that an immaterial and unextended soul is incomprehensible and is a philosophical imposture.<sup>88</sup> Such remarks indicate that unorthodox views of the soul were probably quite common (and those holding them included Locke), but do not necessarily provide proof of an espousal of Epicurean philosophy. It has been suggested that Newton himself adopted the ancient atomic "vulgate" of the inherent movement of atoms and that his treatment of attraction provided ammunition for materialists such as Toland and others in their defense of active and even sentient matter.<sup>89</sup> B. J. T. Dobbs claims that Newton's final position was a combination of Epicurean atomism with a Stoic conception of divine substance which replaced the void and accounted for the active principle of gravity.<sup>90</sup>

The influence of English thinking, including to some extent the continuation of the Protestant tradition of mortalism, combined with Epicurean elements, is to be found in the works of the Italian exile Alberto Radicati di Passerano, who left his native Piedmont because of his conversion to Protestantism and spent the rest of his life conducting a nomadic existence.<sup>91</sup> During his stay in England in the 1730s, before his lonely death in Holland, he published a work called in its English translation *A Philosophical Dissertation on Death*, considered to be so shocking that Radicati was arrested, together with his publisher and translator.<sup>92</sup> In this work, specifically aimed at removing the fear of death, Radicati develops the Epicurean themes that death is nothing, to the extent that he defends suicide. His argument is based on a materialistic conception of the world and of humans, in which death is simply the dissolution of atoms which are re-combined to form other bodies. He begins his work by positing the eternal existence of atoms and the void and stating that the atoms are necessarily in permanent motion, but his claim that "motion is to matter as essential as heat is to fire"<sup>93</sup> probably betrays the influence of Toland. He also claims that the particular modifications of matter are always the same and cannot vary although individuals are in perpetual change.<sup>94</sup> While Radicati was more interested in the ill effects on society of religious beliefs and in attacking "priestcraft" than in providing a natural history of man, his works, which seem to have circulated, help to show the



use of Epicurean themes and the way that they could be combined with aspects of other traditions to encourage a naturalistic view of humans.

Indeed, a certain number of irreligious works that circulated clandestinely in eighteenth-century France seem to be calling on the Epicurean tradition when developing arguments against an immaterial and/or immortal soul which distinguished humans from animals. An example is the long, atheistic, seventeenth-century Latin work called *Theophrastus Redivivus*, which calls on a variety of philosophical traditions; while rejecting atomism and the void, the anonymous author quotes frequently from Lucretius and accords particular importance to Epicurean themes, concerning notably death or the material soul.<sup>95</sup> As has been pointed out by several scholars, we find in early eighteenth-century French irreligious works two different models for explaining intellectual functions without recourse to an immaterial soul, one positing a material soul and the other seeing it as simply the result of a particular structure of the brain and nerves.<sup>96</sup> While the former has Epicurean antecedents, it derives mainly from the passage by Guillaume Lamy that we have already mentioned, and thus has clear Stoic overtones. Nevertheless, the notion of a material soul composed of subtle matter similar to the animal soul, in the Epicurean tradition, is the favorite solution to the problem of providing a materialistic explanation for human intellectual faculties in many early works. For example the most famous and widely distributed of these irreligious works which circulated in various forms under the names of *Traité des trois imposteurs* and *Esprit de Spinoza* and was published several times, reproduces Lamy's passage on the material soul.<sup>97</sup> A much less widely circulated manuscript work called *L'âme matérielle* develops arguments against the soul's immortality and the existence of immaterial substance derived from a variety of sources, including Lucretius, and also quotes Gassendi and Lamy.<sup>98</sup> However the hypothesis of a material soul gradually lost its appeal in favor of emergentist theories, attempting to explain how the brain thinks and drawing on medical investigations, which is where the question of vital matter comes to the fore. It is interesting that the manuscript called *Parité de la vie et de la mort*, which insists that movement is an essential property of matter, is the re-working of a book published by a medical doctor called Abraham Gaultier, who was influenced by Lamy's works. Gaultier referred to Bayle's discussion of the



attribution of feeling to atoms in the article “Epicure,” quoted above.<sup>99</sup> According to Miguel Benitez, these clandestine treatises only very rarely adopted atoms and the void, drawing instead on various traditions of vital matter. He claims that for their authors atomism was incapable of solving the problems associated with living matter and was even incompatible with materialism.<sup>100</sup>

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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One should not however conclude that Epicureanism played no role in the naturalistic explanations of humans that were elaborated in eighteenth-century France. In England naturalistic interpretations of humans remained in the Christian mortalist tradition. The discussion of the soul added to Bernard Mandeville’s *Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases* in 1730 stuck to theological arguments for thinking matter,<sup>101</sup> and in the mid-1750s a debate on whether life and thought could be connected to matter was sparked off by the Bishop of Carlisle Edmund Law’s defense of mortalism.<sup>102</sup> In the 1770s Joseph Priestley developed what he called a materialistic system that according to him corresponded to the true Christian doctrine.<sup>103</sup> But the openly irreligious materialism developed in France in this period clearly drew in part on Epicureanism, which was combined with other influences in order to elaborate a coherent materialistic explanation of humans. We need, therefore, to moderate Schmidt’s claims that “wherever, during that time, atheism comes to the fore, it is nearly always in the form of Epicurean forms or doctrines.” It is difficult to agree that “Epicureanism is, in essence, the scientific, doctrinal, and ethical expression of atheism,” and that through Lucretius it emerged more openly and recovered its lost vigor in the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>104</sup>

We can usefully begin a consideration of eighteenth-century Epicurean materialism by looking at the way Epicureanism was presented in the *Encyclopédie*. The *Encyclopédie* article “Epicuréisme ou Epicurisme,” written by Diderot, provides a clear exposition of the main tenets of this philosophy taken from Jakob Brucker’s *History of Philosophy*, taking care to ask the reader to remember that it is Epicurus who is speaking, not the

author of the article. Diderot brings out clearly the eternity of the universe, the chance creation of the world, the eternal movements of atoms, and the materiality of the soul. While it is obvious that Diderot's philosophy does not correspond in all particulars with what he expounds here, it is notable that after the exposition, he writes:

Those are the fundamental points of the doctrine of Epicurus, the only one of all the classical philosophers who was able to reconcile his ethics with what he could take to be true human happiness and his precepts with the appetites and needs of nature; hence he has always had and will always have a large number of disciples. One can turn oneself into a Stoic but one is born an *Epicurean*.<sup>105</sup>

Indeed, the theological critics of the *Encyclopédie* accused Diderot of using Epicurus as a screen to develop his own materialism.<sup>106</sup>

However, the article "Atomisme," written by Abbé Yvon, while summarizing the main tenets as laid out by Lucretius, in particular the chance origin of the world and the refusal of finalism, precisely denies accusations of atheism, and refers the reader to Cudworth's demonstration that atomism is entirely compatible with belief in immaterial substances.<sup>107</sup> Much of this article was taken from one written by the Berlin-based Protestant pastor J. H. S. Formey, who developed the arguments further in the *Encyclopédie* article "Corpusculaire" where we read, for example:

Far from leading to atheism, *corpuscular* philosophy brings us to recognize the existence of beings distinct from matter. *Corpuscular* physics only attributes to bodies what is included in the idea of something impenetrable and extended and what can be conceived as one of its modifications, like size, divisibility, figure, situation, movement and rest, and everything resulting from their different combinations; thus this physics cannot accept that life and thought are modifications of the body. From which it follows that they are properties of another substance distinct from the body.<sup>108</sup>

The *Encyclopédie* thus reflects the differing views on this subject in the period, ranging from implied approval of the basic Epicurean tenets which undermined religion to the defense of a Christianized form of Epicureanism. There was however little support for the chance creation of the world by the encounters of insensitive atoms, as can be seen in the anonymous article "Hazard," which is mainly a translation of the article published in Chambers's *Cyclopaedia*. It reproduces Richard Bentley's criticism of the chance creation of the world in his Boyle lectures, in order to demonstrate the need for a creator behind the laws governing the world.

Bentley showed that what we take to be a chance occurrence corresponds simply to the workings of the divinely ordained laws of nature. But in the *Encyclopédie* article a sentence is added specifying: “We would say as much about the universe if all the properties of matter were properly known to us.”<sup>109</sup> This addition implies that matter possesses properties which suffice to explain the universe in material terms. It shows once again that the fundamental question revolves around the properties of matter. In *Système de la Nature*, d’Holbach devotes several chapters to a similar criticism of chance; he writes for example that in dust storms or tempests, “there is not a single molecule of dust or water which is where it is by chance, without a sufficient cause to be in the place it is, and which does not act rigorously in the way it should.” Thus knowledge of the different forces and the properties of the molecules concerned would enable one to demonstrate that each molecule is acting exactly as it should and could not act otherwise.<sup>110</sup>

However despite the ambivalent nature of the Epicurean legacy in the eighteenth century evident in the *Encyclopédie*, it would probably be accurate to say that the irreligious facet of atomism came to the fore in this period. The publication in 1749 of the French translation of Cardinal de Polignac’s poem *L’Anti-Lucrèce*, originally published in Latin in 1745 and directed against all materialists, insisted on the importance for materialistic arguments of Epicureanism, especially as expounded in Lucretius’s poem. The preface claims that “the materialists recognize Epicurus as their leader” and provides a summary of “Epicurus’s System.”<sup>111</sup> This work defending the divine creation of the universe may well have encouraged recourse to the “Epicurean system” expounded in Lucretius’s poem by those who aimed at undermining religious arguments. Among such authors was probably Dr. Julien Offray de La Mettrie, the notorious atheist and materialist, who published soon afterwards a short work called, in its final version, *Système d’Epicure*. There are numerous references to Epicureanism in La Mettrie’s philosophical writings, a series of short treatises published mainly between 1745 and his death in 1751, the most notorious of which was *L’Homme machine* (1747). Together they constituted what he called his “natural history of man.” While usually citing Lucretius, he also often took Epicurean themes from the seventeenth-century *libertins* or from Montaigne, whom he called “the first Frenchman who dared to think.”<sup>112</sup>

La Mettrie's Epicureanism can be seen in certain aspects of his naturalism, notably his anti-finalism and refusal of an immaterial and immortal soul.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, so keen was he to enroll illustrious names under his banner that he attributed a rejection of finalism to Gassendi, citing him in *L'Histoire naturelle de l'âme* together with Doctor Guillaume Lamy as two modern Epicureans "who would not believe that the human body's tools were made in order to produce certain fixed movements as soon as there was a motive force."<sup>114</sup> Lamy was a particular favorite of La Mettrie who writes in *L'Homme machine* that it is possible:

that Lucretius, Dr Lamy and all past and present Epicureans might well be right when they claim that the eye sees only because it happens to be organized and placed as it is.<sup>115</sup>

Similarly, in *L'Histoire naturelle de l'âme* (1745), he quotes favorably Lamy's description of the material soul that as we have seen was incorporated into several irreligious works. In his main work *L'Homme machine*, however, La Mettrie does not adopt the theory of a material soul, claiming instead that what thinks in our brains is a particular organization of matter.<sup>116</sup> But he still refers sympathetically to those doctors who did adopt an Epicurean conception of a material soul present throughout the body, seeing them as allies in his campaign to promote a material conception of humans.<sup>117</sup>

In *Système d'Epicure* La Mettrie outlined Lucretius's account of the origin of life and animals, including the theory that the earth had formed the uterus for the first humans.<sup>118</sup> He described the chance formation of all animals, including humans, and the creation of imperfect individuals before the production of the most suitable type.<sup>119</sup> But this work contains a certain number of contradictory and puzzling aspects, and it seems that his aim in using Lucretius was more to reject divine creation and final causes than to provide a coherent explanation of the origin of things.<sup>120</sup> La Mettrie did not in general follow Epicurean physics, did not espouse the theory of the chance origin of the world, and had little recourse to atomism. He too was particularly concerned with demonstrating the capacity of matter to feel and to think, for which he called on medical examples and the comparative anatomy of humans and animals. Thus, while he can be called Epicurean in a general sense and while he knew and frequently quoted Lucretius, his

Epicureanism had its limits and its ambiguities, as did that of his contemporaries.<sup>121</sup>

Among the most distinguished of those contemporaries was Buffon, the first three volumes of whose influential *Histoire naturelle* were published after a certain amount of delay in 1749; La Mettrie devotes a footnote to his “new and ingenious hypothesis” in *Système d’Epicure* (§XLI). In Volume II Buffon developed his theory of reproduction in terms of organic molecules<sup>122</sup> and interior molds. This theory owes a lot to the ideas of his friend the scientist Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, President of the Berlin Academy of Sciences. Maupertuis’s explanation of reproduction was based on a system of attraction of the smallest particles of matter, which according to him possess something like “desire, aversion, memory.”<sup>123</sup> Despite the support that his system could provide for a materialistic conception of living beings, Maupertuis presented his hypothesis, inspired by Newtonianism, as a counter to the impious Epicurean system of the creation of the world by the chance meeting of eternal atoms without feeling or intelligence. He emphasized the need for a creator, describing his system as an alternative both to that of Lucretius and to doctrines defending the direct intervention of the creator or some sort of spiritual principle or plastic nature like that of Cudworth in the formation of bodies.<sup>124</sup> While Buffon saw matter as living and thus recognized forces contained in the molecule, he did not go as far as Maupertuis and thus, whatever may have been his private beliefs, he escaped the accusation of defending materialism. Jacques Roger however considered that Buffon was closer to the Epicurean atheists and linked him to the seventeenth-century Epicurean biologists, pointing to his atomism, hostility towards final causes, and sympathy for something like spontaneous generation.<sup>125</sup>

These different strands of thought and reflections come together in the work of Denis Diderot, who spent many years pondering philosophical and scientific questions before developing his mature thoughts in a fundamentally materialistic view of humans, in which there is a clear Epicurean slant. In his early deistic *Pensées philosophiques* (1745), despite his admiration for Lucretius,<sup>126</sup> Diderot attempted to counter atheistic arguments based on Epicurean principles and defended divine creation against the chance collision of atoms. In his discussion of the crucial question of whether sentient beings could be formed by matter alone,

Diderot may have been influenced by the Swiss scientist Louis Bourguet's discussion of the exchange between Pierre Bayle and Jean Le Clerc on the subject of Cudworth's "plastick natures." Bourguet insisted that combinations of molecules of matter could never form organized beings:

that is why all those who have not been blinded by Stratonism or Epicureanism have recourse to some superior principle which can dispose all these materials and make them into bodies whose shape and parts are infinitely distant from the simplicity of those of these corpuscles and the perfection of their activity.<sup>127</sup>

Bourguet's "organic mechanism" claimed to provide a scientific explanation for organized beings and may well have appealed to Diderot in his search for arguments against the atheists.<sup>128</sup>

Three years later in *Lettre sur les aveugles*, which landed its author in prison, Diderot had moved closer to an openly atheistic position and put into the mouth of the dying, blind, English mathematician Saunderson an inspired view of the universe clearly taken from the fifth book of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*.<sup>129</sup> The change of attitude may be due to the influence of Buffon,<sup>130</sup> or possibly to La Mettrie, who may in turn have been influenced by it in *Système d'Epicure* in view of similarities between the two works. Diderot may also have been struck by Tremblay's discovery of the regenerative powers of the freshwater polyp, which La Mettrie cited in his criticism of the deism Diderot had expounded in *Pensées philosophiques*. La Mettrie claimed it showed that nature contained the powers necessary to produce the world.<sup>131</sup> Although Saunderson's diatribe only refers to the origin of life, in subsequent works Diderot frequently returned to the nature of matter. This is the case for his *Encyclopédie* article "Animal" in which, while borrowing largely from Buffon's work, he goes much further in insinuating the capacity of matter to feel and even to think.<sup>132</sup>

In subsequent works Diderot returned continually to the question of the properties of what he usually called the molecule, which seems to be the equivalent of the Epicurean atom. He discussed the molecule in 1753 in *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature*, a work which also contained a strong attack on final causes.<sup>133</sup> In this work he claimed that Maupertuis's theory of generation led to "most seductive materialism" or Spinozism, and stated a preference for Buffon's organic molecule.<sup>134</sup> But Diderot himself



accorded these molecules a sort of “obtuse and dull sense of touch,”<sup>135</sup> which as Maupertuis retorted, came more or less to the same thing as his own claim and was open to the same accusations of favoring materialism.<sup>136</sup>

In general Diderot accorded activity and sensibility to molecules while generally refusing them thought. As he explained in a private letter in 1759, he did not see how a merely different arrangement of insensitive molecules could produce thought.<sup>137</sup> He here seems clearly to be rejecting the Epicurean hypothesis, using arguments similar to those of Bayle.<sup>138</sup> The solution he finally adopted was probably the one expressed in a later letter written in 1765. Here he wrote that thought results from the innate but inert sensitivity of matter, which is activated in living organisms,<sup>139</sup> an idea which is found in *Rêve de d’Alembert*.<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless he continued to be worried by the questions of whether all molecules possess sensitivity or whether this property is the result of a particular organization, and of how intelligence is then produced. In his 1773 comments on Helvétius’s *De l’homme*, he stated that the hypothesis of the general sensitivity of material molecules is not a reliable postulate, but simply a “supposition whose force comes from the difficulties it removes, which is not enough in good philosophy.”<sup>141</sup> The hesitation seems to subsist to some extent in *Le Rêve de d’Alembert*, which presents his mature reflection on the theme.<sup>142</sup> Here the sensitivity of the molecules of matter, which corresponds to their life, forms the basis for his attempt to account for life and human intelligence. But if Diderot’s conception of the molecule differs from the Epicurean description of the atom, he does consistently, like Lucretius, affirm the necessary heterogeneity of these molecules.<sup>143</sup> In brief thoughts set down in *Principes philosophiques sur la matière et le mouvement*, he insists that it is because each molecule has its own nature and action that matter is never at rest, and later in the same little text he refers to the atom which has its own force.<sup>144</sup>

When we study in detail Diderot’s philosophy of humans as expounded notably in *Rêve de d’Alembert*, it is clear that while we find a certain number of Epicurean elements, he cannot adopt all of Epicurean philosophy due to problems concerning in particular the properties of atoms (which he tends to call molecules) and the explanation of feeling and thought.<sup>145</sup> As



we have already seen, this was the fundamental difficulty for those who wished to base a naturalistic explanation of humans on Epicurean philosophy. Diderot's solution has been called vitalistic, and his thought was clearly influenced by the Montpellier medical tradition.

This question is closely linked to that of spontaneous generation, which is generally seen as a characteristic of Epicurean materialism in this period. The belief in spontaneous generation which had long been widespread had been discredited by the late seventeenth century with the rise of theories of preformation, which seemed to be backed up by scientific observation.<sup>146</sup> According to Jacques Roger, spontaneous generation seemed to demonstrate the creative potentiality of matter and remove the need for a creator, which is why it appealed to Diderot and to some extent to Buffon.<sup>147</sup> Contrary to what has been claimed, however, La Mettrie did not espouse it and in a little work called *L'Homme-plante* he defended preformation against the claim made by John Turberville Needham on the basis of observations that living beings were generated by the decomposition of matter.<sup>148</sup> Diderot, on the contrary, in a long passage in the *Rêve* propounding a Lucretian vision of the universe which he puts in the mouth of the dreaming D'Alembert, defends "the passage from the state of inertia to that of sensitivity" together with spontaneous generation, referring specifically to Needham.<sup>149</sup> The same experiments and Needham's observation are likewise quoted favorably in d'Holbach's *Système de la Nature*, the main campaigning work in favor of atheistic materialism.<sup>150</sup> The reference to Needham serves the same purpose for d'Holbach as it does for Diderot, namely to demonstrate the energy of matter, although d'Holbach's main reference is John Toland's *Letters to Serena*, which d'Holbach had translated in 1768. *Système de la Nature* contains much that is of Epicurean or perhaps more specifically Lucretian tonality in its insistence on the formation of the world by the combination of eternal, uncreated, indestructible, and eternally moving elements, but unlike Diderot, d'Holbach does not develop a reflection on these elements, sometimes called molecules, and both the terms used and the model are imprecise.<sup>151</sup>

The works of these eighteenth-century materialists La Mettrie, Diderot, and d'Holbach show the complex nature of their debt to Epicureanism which is often more visible in a general attitude than in faithfulness to

Epicurean teaching. In addition, the aspects of Epicureanism used in their naturalistic presentation of humans varied from author to author. This process can also be seen in the group of thinkers known as the Idéologues in late eighteenth-century France. Dr. Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis developed an openly materialistic view of humans, insisting that the study of the vital phenomena and physical organization is the basis of the science of man and claiming that thought was produced by the brain. In the Preface to his 1802 *Rapports du physique et du moral*, the first of which were originally delivered to the Institut in 1796–97, he began by placing himself in the tradition of Epicurus, the “restorer” of Democritus, which continued through Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, and Helvétius.<sup>152</sup> As Saad has shown, Cabanis emphasized the close link between medicine and philosophy, insisting on the medical investigations carried out by Democritus.<sup>153</sup> Cabanis writes that Democritus’s philosophy was revived by Epicurus, who developed its principles, widened its scope, and “founded morals on man’s physical nature.”<sup>154</sup> There are also some clear reminiscences of Lucretius’s poem; for example, in the tenth “Mémoire” there is a section devoted to the appearance of animal life with a discussion of spontaneous generation which has obvious Lucretian overtones. Here Cabanis continues speculations on living matter in the tradition of those we have seen, with a criticism of Buffon’s distinction between dead and living matter and the claim that “given certain conditions, inanimate matter is capable of organizing itself, living and feeling.”<sup>155</sup> However, in the development of his materialistic system based on the study of sensitivity there is little reference to Epicurean philosophy, which seems to be used mainly as an example of a materialistic philosophy, in the well-established eighteenth-century tradition. In general, in the development of his anthropology, Cabanis is far from faithful to the Epicurean tradition.<sup>156</sup>

It is curious to note that well into the following century a medical doctor professing materialism still placed himself under the banner of Epicurean philosophy and looked back to Gassendi. Dr. Jean André Rochoux published several works defending a materialistic or what he called “unitarian” (but not atheistic) view of humans similar to that of the eighteenth-century thinkers we have seen, based on Epicurean philosophy and scientific research. Rochoux, like his predecessors, insisted on the vital properties of matter. He wrote at the beginning of his refutation of Cartesian

philosophy that “a single principle, the atom endowed with movement, or active matter, is enough to explain all the phenomena of nature.” Hence anyone who recognizes the activity that is eternally inseparable from the atom is an Epicurean.<sup>157</sup> He thus annexed Leibniz and Newton, claiming that despite appearances they in fact accepted that hypothesis, “the only one which is not forced to retreat in the face of the demands of science.”<sup>158</sup> For him the activity of matter was demonstrated by the findings of modern science, in particular by microscopic observations.

## CONCLUSION

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This final example provides further evidence that the role played by Epicureanism in the elaboration of a natural history of man in the early modern period was ambiguous and contradictory. Epicurean philosophy, often as expounded in *De rerum natura*, was undoubtedly a presence, but its importance is often difficult to judge in view of its use as a label to attack heterodox views and of the fact that few of those who had recourse to it adopted it as a whole. For this reason, contrary to what has been claimed, Epicureanism or recourse to Lucretius did not necessarily mean a backward-looking stance rejecting the findings of contemporary science.<sup>159</sup> It was possible to be attentive to scientific developments while at the same time proclaiming an allegiance to Epicureanism. Epicurean philosophy, in particular as expounded in Lucretius’s poem, was a permanent presence in naturalistic theories, but was normally part of a more eclectic framework. On the crucial question of how to account for feeling and in particular thought without recourse to immaterial substance, it was necessary to look to other hypotheses. Thinkers therefore took those aspects which corresponded to their aim and combined them with different scientific theories, without apparently feeling the need to subscribe to even central tenets of Epicureanism. As time went on, reference to Epicureanism seems to have functioned mainly as a symbol of the rejection of central Christian doctrines and as a way of proclaiming one’s materialism.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Bloch, *Matière à histoires*, Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France*.

<sup>2</sup> The moral and political implications of these naturalistic arguments and the role played by Epicureanism in those discussions are outside the scope of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 61–62.

<sup>4</sup> See Lagrée, "Spinoza 'athée et épicurien.'"

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, "Epicureanism in Early Modern Philosophy," 91.

<sup>6</sup> Brundell, *Pierre Gassendi*, 137–38. For a nuanced discussion, see Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France*, 5–48.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, "Epicureanism in Early Modern Philosophy," 111.

<sup>8</sup> Osler, *Divine Will and the Mechanical Philosophy*, 175–76.

<sup>9</sup> For example Mabillean, *Histoire de la philosophie atomistique*.

<sup>10</sup> For the "libertins" (a word with a meaning much wider than "libertine"), see in particular Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit*; and Charles-Daubert, *Les libertins érudits en France au XVIIe siècle*.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory, "Il libertinismo della prima metà del seicento," 18.

<sup>12</sup> Bernier, *Abrégé de la philosophie de Gassendi*.

<sup>13</sup> Osler, "Fortune, Fate and Divination," 155.

<sup>14</sup> Margaret J. Osler reviews some of the different opinions in "When Did Pierre Gassendi Become a Libertine?," 168–92, but she tends to caricature the position of Olivier Bloch, who does not share Pintard's view of Gassendi's dissimulation, and specifically writes that he sees no reason to doubt Gassendi's professions of faith. See rather Duchesneau, *Les modèles du vivant de Descartes à Leibniz*, 87 and Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729*, 50–60.

<sup>15</sup> Bloch, *La philosophie de Gassendi*, 151, 474–81.

- <sup>16</sup> Bernier, *Voyages*, 1.169–205.
- <sup>17</sup> See Fisher, *Pierre Gassendi's Philosophy and Science*, 247–63.
- <sup>18</sup> Lolordo, *Pierre Gassendi and the Birth of Early Modern Philosophy*, 142–44.
- <sup>19</sup> See Clericuzio, “Gassendi, Charleton and Boyle on Matter and Motion.”
- <sup>20</sup> Fisher, *Pierre Gassendi's Philosophy and Science*, 299 and “The Soul as Vehicle for Genetic Information,” 122–23. See also Bloch, *Matière à histoires*, 167–73; Duchesneau, *Les modèles du vivant de Descartes à Leibniz*, 86–115; Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles and Corpuscles*, 63–71; and Lolordo, *Pierre Gassendi and the Birth of Early Modern Philosophy*, 183–97.
- <sup>21</sup> Duchesneau, *Les modèles du vivant de Descartes à Leibniz*, 114.
- <sup>22</sup> See, for example, Sarasohn, “Motion and Morality.”
- <sup>23</sup> Clucas, “The Atomism of the Cavendish Circle: A Reappraisal”; see also Clucas, “Corpuscular Matter Theory in the Northumberland Circle.”
- <sup>24</sup> See Hutton, “Some Thoughts Concerning Ralph Cudworth,” 149; Gregory, “Studi sull’atomismo del seicento III Cudworth e l’atomismo.”
- <sup>25</sup> Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 10.
- <sup>26</sup> Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, 151–52.
- <sup>27</sup> Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 105.
- <sup>28</sup> See Simonutti, “Bayle and Le Clerc as Readers of Cudworth” and Kors, *Naturalism and Unbelief in France*, 272–79.
- <sup>29</sup> Zarka, “Critique de Hobbes,” 39–40.
- <sup>30</sup> See, for example, Charles Wolseley’s “Atheists’ Catechism” (1666), which attributed to Hobbes atheistic principles based on Epicurean philosophy, quoted by Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, 39–40.
- <sup>31</sup> See Bloch, *Matière à histoires*, 21–35.
- <sup>32</sup> Bentley, *The Folly and Unreasonableness of Atheism*.
- <sup>33</sup> See in particular Pacchi, “Hobbes e l’epicureismo.”
- <sup>34</sup> See Kargon, *Atomism in England from Hariot to Newton*, 73–76.
- <sup>35</sup> Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, 264.
- <sup>36</sup> Bayle, *Œuvres diverses*, 3.343.
- <sup>37</sup> Osler, *Divine Will and the Mechanical Philosophy*, 178–79. See also Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity*, 82–85.
- <sup>38</sup> Baxter, *The Reasons of the Christian Religion*, 498–506.
- <sup>39</sup> Baxter, *Of the Nature of Spirits*, 9. On More and Baxter, see Crocker, *Henry More, 1614–1687*, 170–76 and Reid, *The Metaphysics of Henry More*, 192–197.
- <sup>40</sup> Bayle, *An Historical and Critical Dictionary*, 3.1924.
- <sup>41</sup> Bayle, *An Historical and Critical Dictionary*, 2.1189.
- <sup>42</sup> See, for example, Paganini, “Tra Epicureo e Stratone,” 86.
- <sup>43</sup> For a discussion of the larger theological context, see Brogi, “Nature plastiche e disegni divini.”
- <sup>44</sup> In particular Bayle, *Œuvres diverses*, 3.216–17. See also Simonutti, “Bayle and Le Clerc as Readers of Cudworth,” 156–58.
- <sup>45</sup> See, for example, Bayle, *An Historical and Critical Dictionary*, 3.1924.
- <sup>46</sup> Paganini, “Tra Epicureo e Stratone,” 88–89, who also cites Bayle’s comparison in “Rorarius,” note L; and Robinet, “Les différentes lectures du *System* de Cudworth par G. W. Leibniz,” 192–95.

<sup>47</sup> Wilson, "Epicureanism in Early Modern Philosophy," 94. For a more detailed discussion of Leibniz's criticism of atomism, see Wilson, "Leibniz and Atomism."

<sup>48</sup> Brown, "The Proto-Monadology of the *De Summa Rerum*," 271. See also Paganini, *Analisi della fede*, 421. Konrad Moll has emphasized the influence of Gassendi on Leibniz, with whom he shared the aim of opposing atheism: Moll, "L'atomisme Gassendien et la genèse du système de Leibniz," 275–79.

<sup>49</sup> Frank, *Harvey and the Oxford Physiologists*, 90–93.

<sup>50</sup> Charleton, *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charletoniana*, 126.

<sup>51</sup> Gelbart, "The Intellectual Development of Walter Charleton," 157.

<sup>52</sup> Charleton, *The Immortality of the Human Soul*, 184–85.

<sup>53</sup> Charleton, *A Natural History of Nutrition*, 116–25. See Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles and Corpuscles*, 97–100.

<sup>54</sup> On Glisson, see Giglioni, "Anatomist Atheist?"

<sup>55</sup> See Blank, "Atoms and Minds," 137.

<sup>56</sup> See King, *The Philosophy of Medicine*, 82.

<sup>57</sup> The use of Gassendi in Willis's discussion of the soul is indicated in more detail in King, *The Philosophy of Medicine*, 141.

<sup>58</sup> Willis, *Two Discourses Concerning the Soul of Brutes*, 23.

<sup>59</sup> See Wright, "Locke, Willis and the Seventeenth-century Epicurean Soul"; Duchesneau, *Les modèles du vivant de Descartes à Leibniz*, 85–117.

<sup>60</sup> Willis, *Two Discourses Concerning the Soul of Brutes*, 33.

<sup>61</sup> See Crignon, "How Animals may help us understand Men".

<sup>62</sup> Willis, *Two Discourses Concerning the Soul of Brutes*, 24–29.

<sup>63</sup> Bynum, "Anatomical Method," 447.

<sup>64</sup> Jeannerod, *Le cerveau-machine*, 19.

<sup>65</sup> Rey, "Gassendi et les sciences de la vie au XVIIIe siècle."

<sup>66</sup> See Metzger, *Les doctrines chimiques*, 223–26.

<sup>67</sup> On this work, see Kubbinga, *L'Histoire du concept de "molécule"*, 266–69 and Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France*, 81–90.

<sup>68</sup> See Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France*, 122–38.

<sup>69</sup> Lamy, *Discours anatomiques*, 174.

<sup>70</sup> Lamy, *Discours anatomiques*, 104.

<sup>71</sup> See Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France*, 78–81.

<sup>72</sup> See Thomson, "Guillaume Lamy et l'âme matérielle."

<sup>73</sup> See Bonanate, "Cultura classica e critica libertina in Inghilterra"; and Iofrida, "La presenza della cultura libertina in Inghilterra alla fine del '600."

<sup>74</sup> Blount, *The Oracles of Reason*, 119–27.

<sup>75</sup> Sergio, "Filosofia, natura e pensiero libertino."

<sup>76</sup> See Thomson, "Epicurisme et matérialisme en Angleterre au début du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle".

<sup>77</sup> Manlove, *The Immortality of the Soul*, 6.

<sup>78</sup> Layton, *A Second Part of a Treatise*, 61–63. See Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 98–104.

<sup>79</sup> See Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 104–17.

<sup>80</sup> See, for example, Broughton, *Psychologia*, xiii; Assheton, *A Vindication of the Immortality of the Soul*, 2.

- <sup>81</sup> Hole, *An Antidote against Infidelity*, 43.
- <sup>82</sup> Coward, *Farther Thoughts*, 108.
- <sup>83</sup> Coward, *Second Thoughts on Human Soul*, 348.
- <sup>84</sup> Coward, *The Grand Essay*, 153–54.
- <sup>85</sup> Lurbe, “John Toland et l’épicurisme,” 573. See also Cherchi, *Pantheisticon*; Iofrida, *La filosofia di John Toland*; Giuntini, *Panteismo e ideologia repubblicana*.
- <sup>86</sup> Toland, *Letters to Serena*, 193–94.
- <sup>87</sup> Thomson, “Animals, Humans, Machines.”
- <sup>88</sup> Raphson, *Demonstratio de Deo*, 53–61.
- <sup>89</sup> Casini, “Newton, Diderot et la vulgate de l’atomisme.”
- <sup>90</sup> Dobbs, “Stoic and Epicurean Doctrines.”
- <sup>91</sup> See Cavallo, “‘Atheists or Deists more charitable than superstitious Zealots’: Alberto Radicati’s Intellectual Parabola”
- <sup>92</sup> See Venturi, *Saggi sull’Europa illuminista*.
- <sup>93</sup> Radicati di Passerano, *A Philosophical Dissertation on Death*, 8.
- <sup>94</sup> Radicati di Passerano, *A Philosophical Dissertation on Death*, 9–10.
- <sup>95</sup> Canziani and Paganini, *Theophrastus redivivus*; see also Donis, “Nature, plaisir et mort dans le *Theophrastus Redivivus*.”
- <sup>96</sup> Vartanian, “Quelques réflexions,” 149.
- <sup>97</sup> See Charles-Daubert, *Le “Traité des trois imposteurs” et “L’Esprit de Spinoza,”* 358–61.
- <sup>98</sup> Niderst, *L’Ame matérielle*, 53–54, 169.
- <sup>99</sup> Bloch, *Parité de la vie et de la mort*, 157–58. For an interpretation of this work which differs from that of Bloch, see Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France*, 149–58.
- <sup>100</sup> Benitez, “Naturalisme et atomisme.”
- <sup>101</sup> Mandeville, *Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases*, 50–53. This interpretation differs from that of Hundert, *The Enlightenment’s Fable*, 43–45, 58.
- <sup>102</sup> See Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 217.
- <sup>103</sup> Priestley, *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit*. See Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 233–34; and for a slightly different approach Niblett, “Man, Morals and Matter.”
- <sup>104</sup> Schmidt, “Diderot and Lucretius,” 187, 191.
- <sup>105</sup> *Encyclopédie*, 5.784. On this article, see Holley, “The Poison and the Spider’s Web,” 1118–22.
- <sup>106</sup> See Proust, *Diderot et l’Encyclopédie*, 260–63.
- <sup>107</sup> *Encyclopédie*, 1.823.
- <sup>108</sup> *Encyclopédie*, 4.269–70.
- <sup>109</sup> *Encyclopédie*, 8.74.
- <sup>110</sup> D’Holbach, *Système de la Nature*, 51.
- <sup>111</sup> Polignac, *L’Anti-Lucrèce*, 1.iv, x.
- <sup>112</sup> La Mettrie, *Machine Man*, 129.
- <sup>113</sup> I have discussed the more general question of his Epicureanism in Thomson, “La Mettrie et l’épicurisme.” See also Comte-Sponville, “La Mettrie et le ‘Système d’Epicure.’”
- <sup>114</sup> *Abrégé des systèmes*, §VI, in La Mettrie, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 1.259.
- <sup>115</sup> La Mettrie, *Machine Man*, 25.
- <sup>116</sup> La Mettrie, *Machine Man*, 26.
- <sup>117</sup> La Mettrie, *Machine Man*, 32.

- <sup>118</sup> La Mettrie, *Machine Man*, 93.
- <sup>119</sup> La Mettrie, *Machine Man*, 94.
- <sup>120</sup> See Thomson, “La Mettrie, Diderot et Lucrèce”.
- <sup>121</sup> For a different interpretation see Wolfe, “A Happiness Fit for Organic Bodies.”
- <sup>122</sup> On the molecule, a word which derives from Gassendi, see Kubbinga, *L’Histoire du concept de “molécule.”*
- <sup>123</sup> Maupertuis, *Essai sur la formation*, 14.
- <sup>124</sup> Maupertuis, *Essai sur la formation*, 62–64.
- <sup>125</sup> Roger, *Les sciences de la vie*, 549–50.
- <sup>126</sup> Casini, “Lucretius,” 296–97.
- <sup>127</sup> Bourguet, *Lettres philosophiques*, 116. See Duchesneau, *Leibniz*, 249–94.
- <sup>128</sup> See Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, 2.25–26. For a different interpretation of this work, see Stenger, “L’atomisme dans les *Pensées philosophiques*,” who sees the direct influence of Gassendi on Diderot’s use of “molecule.”
- <sup>129</sup> Diderot, *Lettre sur les aveugles*, 60–63.
- <sup>130</sup> Roger, *Les sciences de la vie*, 598.
- <sup>131</sup> La Mettrie, *Machine Man*, 24. See Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 187.
- <sup>132</sup> *Encyclopédie*, 1.468–74.
- <sup>133</sup> Diderot, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 235–37.
- <sup>134</sup> Diderot, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 230; see Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 196–97.
- <sup>135</sup> Diderot, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 231.
- <sup>136</sup> Maupertuis, *Œuvres*, 2.212.
- <sup>137</sup> Diderot, *Correspondance*, 2.282.
- <sup>138</sup> Paganini, “Tra Epicureo e Stratone,” 108–109 claims that Diderot took from Bayle the necessary animation of atoms.
- <sup>139</sup> Diderot, *Correspondance*, 5.141.
- <sup>140</sup> Michel Delon sees here the influence of Gassendi’s “*nisus*” (Introduction to *Principes philosophiques* in Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, 17.6–7).
- <sup>141</sup> Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, 11.492.
- <sup>142</sup> See Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, 17.105.
- <sup>143</sup> See Diderot, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 300.
- <sup>144</sup> Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, 17.14, 17.16.
- <sup>145</sup> See Gigandet, “Lucrèce vu en songe” and Thomson, “La Mettrie, Diderot et Lucrèce”.
- <sup>146</sup> Mazzolini and Roe, *Science against the Unbelievers*, 21–22.
- <sup>147</sup> Roger, *Les sciences de la vie*, 527–84.
- <sup>148</sup> La Mettrie, *Machine Man*, 80–81. Needham, *An Account of Some New Microscopical Discoveries*. See Roe, “John Turberville Needham and the Generation of Living Organisms.”
- <sup>149</sup> Diderot, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 299–303.
- <sup>150</sup> D’Holbach, *Système de la Nature*, 23, 18.
- <sup>151</sup> On this subject, and the differences with Toland, see Lurbe, “Matière, nature, mouvement.”
- <sup>152</sup> Cabanis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 1.111–12.
- <sup>153</sup> See Saad, “Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy, Volney.”
- <sup>154</sup> Cabanis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 1.138.
- <sup>155</sup> Cabanis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 1.515–20. See Saad, *Cabanis*, 245.

<sup>156</sup> Saad, “Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy, Volney,” 112.

<sup>157</sup> Rochoux, *Epicure opposé à Descartes*, 11, 15; see Bloch, *Matière à histoires*, 367–83.

<sup>158</sup> Rochoux, *Principes de philosophie naturelle*, 4–5.

<sup>159</sup> Schröder, “Naturphilosophische Spekulation.”



## CHAPTER 26

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# EARLY MODERN EPICUREANISM

*Gassendi and Hobbes in Dialogue on  
Psychology, Ethics, and Politics*

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GIANNI PAGANINI

## ANCIENT AND “MODERN” EPICUREANISM

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IN the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries almost all the principal founders of modern political thought, except Grotius, were accused of “Epicureanism” by theologians, Christian apologists,<sup>1</sup> and now and then by original philosophical thinkers like Vico.<sup>2</sup> This was the case with Hobbes, Locke, Pufendorf, and Bayle, and later with Hume. Sometimes these charges were baseless or only polemical. Sometimes the accusation of Epicureanism did not refer to any clear doctrinal relationship, but just to philosophical positions incompatible with the Stoic-Christian orthodoxy that dominated early modern thinking about natural law. Harsh realism about the “state of nature,” strictly secular versions of the origin of humanity, lack of reference to providence and divine law, and materialistic

or mortalist views of human nature all provoked accusations of “Epicureanism.”<sup>3</sup> The ancient objections to Epicureanism had mostly been ethical or political, for example, disapproval of the sage’s withdrawal from politics and his limitation to a merely private and individual pursuit of wisdom. The “moderns” saw in the teaching of the Garden also a direct threat to the metaphysical and religious foundations of Christian society. Leibniz held that Epicurus’s influence, paired with Spinoza’s, had caused an outbreak of an “epidemic of spiritual disease” that might have resulted in “that general revolution that had threatened all Europe.”<sup>4</sup> For the most part these polemics both ancient and modern were misunderstandings of the real Epicurean doctrine of law and politics.

This distortion came to affect scholarship. The contribution of Epicureanism to modern political thought seems almost programmatically excluded from the mainstream of recent scholarship. Lines of descent from Stoicism are well traced, thanks to the copious literature devoted to Grotius. The role of scholasticism has been revalued, probably beyond its deserts. But there are only a few studies of the role played by Epicureanism, and those have appeared just in the last twenty years.<sup>5</sup> Only then did scholars begin to look at Hobbes in the light of direct influence by the Epicurean tradition, and to study the central figure in seventeenth-century Neo-Epicureanism, Pierre Gassendi.<sup>6</sup> Interest in Gassendi’s physics and epistemology has always been lively, but only recently has similar attention been given his ethics and politics, and the transformation of Epicurean views they introduced.<sup>7</sup>

Here we will examine principally Gassendi and the complex interplay with Hobbes characteristic of his thought. However, before studying the contribution of each, and their influence on each other, it will be useful to summarize briefly the five key points on which Epicureanism made a decisive contribution to the birth of “human rights” and of modern political thought.

- (a) The Epicurean approach favored the abandonment of a metaphysical view of the political order in favor of the adoption of an empirical theory of law; moreover, it claimed to offer a realistic view of the faculties and capacities of man taken as an individual and considered apart from preordained communal bonds. Similarly,

it denied any transcendent idea of justice. This was fundamental both for the definition of modern subjective rights (conceived as something distinct from prescriptive law) as well as for a conception of political association based on individuals, not on the merely communal. In the arena of political thought, three aspects reappear that were also found in ancient Epicureanism: hedonism centered on the “pleasure” of the individual and understood as the aim of human conduct; the view of the political state as merely the provider of external conditions necessary for the “safety” (*asphaleia*) of the citizens, without the ethical significance given these conditions by Aristotelian theories of the virtues, or Platonic metaphysics, or a Stoic belief in the rational order of the universe. The individualism and utilitarianism of the “moderns” was deeply rooted in the Garden of Epicurus.

- (b) The empirical method peculiar to Epicurean legal theory went against doctrines like those of the scholastics and the Stoics, who believed the principles of natural law to be innate, by means of “emanation” (*irradiatio*) from the norms of a transcendent authority and by their “inscription” (*inscriptio*) on the human mind. The Epicurean approach to the subject of political order was ascending not descending, constructive not deductive. It was made to depend on the use of reason and on individual assent, and no longer on any source of superior legitimacy, be it natural or divine. The idea of a rational calculus not only in ethics (the pleasure-pain calculus), but also in politics (the “utilitarian calculus” suggested by legislators and practiced by citizens), was at the base of a conception of political association founded on self-interest (rightly understood) that reappeared in many schools of modern thought.
- (c) The idea of natural law was rethought in an Epicurean context as the “natural right” (*physikon dikaion*) or the “just according to Nature” (*physei dikaion*). This is no longer conceived as human participation in a perfect natural order, but as a way of regulating action by “rationality” or “prudence” that disciplines social life. Here also, in place of an obligation imposed from on high and already inscribed in human nature or in the nature of things generally, legal prescription was based on the agreement of individuals and appealed to reason.

- (d) Thus, the rigid opposition *nomos/physis*, prescriptive law/natural right, was overridden. In Epicurean contexts “natural law” was the positive recognition of a norm corresponding to natural needs and to the “utility” (*to chrēsimon*) of living in society. True and proper law takes its full form and gains its binding force, only thanks to the recognition of positive norms that come from an explicit consent corresponding ultimately to the “nature” of human capacities. It is no accident that both Hobbes and Gassendi, in their different ways, emphasized the close connection between natural and prescriptive law. Hobbes assigned to civil law the task of giving real content and greater efficacy to natural law. Gassendi, as we shall see, was led by his Epicurean studies to hold that a law properly so called is only that which is accompanied by a real power of sanction.
- (e) Two fundamental notions of Epicureanism took new life in modern political thought: that of the social contract, the agreed and consensual basis of law and authority, and that of the “state of nature” that precedes it. However one tries to limit the value of the idea of contract, *synthēkē*, in early Epicureanism, or to assert its differences with the “modern” contractarianism of a Hobbes or a Rousseau,<sup>8</sup> there is still no question that among all ancient traditions the Garden was one of very few to base law and politics on the contract and consent of the contracting parties.<sup>9</sup> Yet, by contrast with the Sophists, who emphasized the conventional aspects so far as to be open to the charge of pure relativism, Epicureans looked for a “weak” but “natural” foundation of the social contract, deducing it from an idea or mental anticipation (*prolēpsis*) of justice based on utility—a fixed criterion, however variable and adaptable according to the circumstances, in which the useful takes shape. Again, it was in Epicureanism that the “moderns” could read a reconstruction (real or fictive) of the way in which men came to form voluntary associations by negotiating the conditions (laws) of their union with a view to shared ends (utility). The other traditions stressed the organic and natural formation of the state from original communities (the family, the village, etc.), or ascribed its origins to a more or less deceitful and violent imposition by myths and impostures, as in the French

“libertine” writers of the seventeenth century. Furthermore, the “state of nature,” as the Epicureans saw it, was no original authority for ideal prescriptive law, no criterion for spontaneous regulation of one’s appetites. It was an original condition without law, always at the mercy of the self-interested actions of individuals.

But beside these continuities, there were also differences and discontinuities with the ancient paradigm. The “reception” of Epicureanism also included reactions to its ideas and transformations of them. That is why we should more properly speak of “Neo-Epicureanism,” to be able to make an effective comparison with Hobbes, beginning with Gassendi’s own positions and not solely from the ancient sources. The most important five innovations of the modern or Neo-Epicureans—primarily Gassendi’s—are these:

- (a) Classical Epicurean political theory assumed that free and equal individuals were capable of making rational calculations about pleasures, pains, and their consequences. However, in the ancient polis, the rank of “free citizen” was restricted to a limited number of the population qualified by birth, family, and property. And even if the founder of the Garden did not hesitate to admit marginal people like women, and perhaps slaves, to his school, neither he nor his disciples ever denounced discrimination against them in the public world of the *polis*. By contrast the “moderns” generalized the principles of equality, freedom, and the rationality of the individuals which the ancient Epicureans had limited to an elite of the wise, accepting as a given that women, slaves, and resident aliens would be in an inferior position in the *polis*. The political theory of authors like Hobbes and Gassendi made the equality and reciprocity of the parties consenting to the social contract explicitly its fundamental condition, essential to its validity. In their world, political union took a higher place than the narrower—but in the Epicureans’ view even more important—association of friendship. “Security,” “utility,” and “contract” became the conditions for a general social life, to which the “moderns” attributed a far greater importance than the narrow association of circles of philosophic friendship.

- (b) To develop the modern doctrine of human rights, seventeenth-century authors had also to deal with the elaborations of the Roman imperial jurists, the medieval canonists, and the Renaissance theorists of law. Generally speaking, the classical sources were relatively reticent on the concept of individual rights,<sup>10</sup> and even Epicureanism had emphasized their consequences in real life rather than their theoretical basis.<sup>11</sup> Gassendi and Hobbes not only distinguished between rights as freedom, and prescriptive laws as obligations, but in doing this were also obliged to make a synthesis of different sources, ancient and medieval. However, that does not make the interplay between the two authors less significant historically.
- (c) Classical Epicureanism changed in the “moderns” from wisdom reserved for the few, and at a distance from the occupations (*negotia*) of public life, to a philosophy for the many. Thus, in the new conditions of European statehood, it could help found a politics of the common man. The example of Gassendi is instructive. In ethics, he stays close to Epicurean moral ideas, distinguishing between different kinds of pleasure and holding that the highest of them are the absence of pain (*aponia*) and tranquility of mind (*ataraxia*), just as in the classical sources. Yet in politics, he adopted a more concrete approach, one that took account of realistic descriptions of human conduct that were emerging from the mechanistic psychology of his age. As we will see, on this subject his views are involved with Hobbes’s and part decisively from the Epicurean sources to embrace the new theory of “mind as machine.” In this context, and for both writers, the idea of “self-preservation” rose to a primary role. Starting from a psychological description of the working of the appetites, and centered on the cardinal role of *philēdonia*, love of pleasure, and *philautia*, self-love, Gassendi postulated that the behavior of the common man in social life should be dominated by the impulse to self-preservation and well-being.
- (d) This motive (self-preservation)—whose importance to Hobbes is well known—had had no great role in the psychological model of classical Epicureanism, which even taught that “death is nothing to

us,” and that the value of pleasure is not measured by duration or intensity. We shall see that this was a profound change in moral psychology, and it is as evident in a writer who presented himself as a Neo-Epicurean like Gassendi as in the more independent Hobbes. Along with “utility” and “security,” amply present already in Epicurean doctrine, “self-preservation” and well-being thus rose to a central position in the politics of society.

- (e) Furthermore, Gassendi opened the way to a more dynamic and extended view both of the pleasure-principle and the concept of self-preservation. Epicurus had been more interested in setting limits to the enjoyment of pleasures, in view of their possible negative consequences, and in conquering the fear of death by the resources of philosophy. The “moderns” wanted rather to prolong life in practical terms and intensify its dynamics in terms of well-being, appealing decisively to the protective function of the state, along with the power of science, rather than to the emancipating power of philosophy. To the supposed invulnerability of the sage, understood as the independence of his happiness from external circumstances, there succeeded a more concrete value: protection furnished by the state in return for obedience given it by its subjects. The fear of death—particularly of violent death at the hands of aggressors—is now seen as an emotion not so much to be exorcised with the resources of philosophical wisdom, but a natural feeling that can be appealed to in justifying the construction of the state. As we know, for Hobbes, fear can induce humanity to make a “rational calculation” (another Epicurean topos), yet not in order for individuals to free themselves from fear, but to produce a collective agreement by which submission to authority and obedience to the laws free citizens from the danger of violence. For the “moderns,” as opposed to the ancients, it is law and politics, not philosophy and ethics, which constitute the appropriate *therapeia* for defeating the fear of death. Death itself, from an individual problem which the sage must solve (“not to fear death” takes second place in the famous *tetrapharmakon*), becomes a collective problem, with which the authority of the state must deal in order to help evade it, at least in the case of violent death.<sup>12</sup> As for mortality considered simply in itself, both Hobbes and Gassendi had recourse



to the idea of an afterlife. Both accepted the idea of resurrection, though here Hobbes, unlike Gassendi, indulged himself in a long theologico-political reinterpretation of “the world to come” as a new terrestrial kingdom of the Messiah on the chosen, with the annihilation of the damned.<sup>13</sup>

## GASSENDI AND HOBBS IN PARIS: THE ELABORATION OF THE NEW “MECHANISTIC” PSYCHOLOGY

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During the greater part of the 1640s Hobbes and Gassendi both lived in Paris and were in close personal contact. From 1641 to 1648, Gassendi was professor of mathematics (after 1646) and astronomy (1645–1646), till his return to Provence (1648). Hobbes was in Paris from his departure from England in December 1640 till the end of December 1651, except for brief sojourns in the countryside. In this period, Hobbes also was appointed tutor in mathematics to the future king, Charles II, who resided at Saint-Germain-en-Laye with his court in exile. We know of the two authors’ close relations and their mutual esteem, and that they followed each other’s works in progress. The preparation of Neo-Epicurean texts by Gassendi had begun in 1626 with the decision to write an “Apologia for Epicurus,” which he worked on until 1629, and then decided to enlarge into a defense not only of Epicurus himself but also his philosophy. The strictly biographical part was published in 1647 as *De vita et moribus Epicuri*. The doctrinal part Gassendi worked on from 1629 to 1633 (preliminary studies) and from 1633 to 1646 (as *De vita et doctrina Epicuri*). Mersenne, during the creation of this work, aimed at giving earlier notice for it by inserting a fragment of it into his *Préludes de l’Harmonie Universelle* of 1634 along with a flattering review of Gassendi’s philosophical work, comparing it both with the ancients and the “moderns.” In 1644 Charles Cavendish stated that Hobbes had read the manuscript of Gassendi’s “philosophy,” almost certainly the manuscript form of *De vita et doctrina Epicuri*. A reworking of the material, reorganized in the form of a philological and philosophical commentary on Diogenes Laertius 10, and dealing entirely with Epicurus

and his school, was published in 1649 as *Animadversiones in decimum librum Diogenis Laertii*, together with a synthesis of Epicurean philosophical doctrine (*Philosophiae Epicuri Syntagma*). The text of 1649 was reused in a work meant to constitute the true and proper “system” of Gassendi and this time without “Epicurus” in the title. It was published only after Gassendi’s death as *Syntagma philosophicum*, the first two volumes of the *Opera omnia* (1658), while the commentary was rewritten and shortened as *Notae in decimum librum Diogenis Laertii*, Volume 5 of the *Opera*. Thus the manuscript that became the *Syntagma philosophicum* was intended by Gassendi to be taken as original work, though Epicureanism is always given a high rank in it. Besides the many systematic comparisons with other philosophies (mostly classical, for contemporaries are only indirectly taken into account), Gassendi did not hesitate to distance himself from Epicurus’s views whenever he thought it necessary. According to Cavendish, in 1644 Hobbes was already following this work in manuscript and was so favorable to Gassendi’s project that he paid it this compliment: “that it is as big as Aristotle’s philosophie, but much truer and excellent Latin.”<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the whole career of both philosophers was marked by mutual compliments. When Hobbes published the second edition of *De cive* in 1647, Sorbière, a friend of both, inserted in the front pages a fine letter of praise from Gassendi. Hobbes did the honors in his turn in *De corpore* (1655), in the great dedication letter where he constructs an ideal genealogy of the “new philosophy.” Here Gassendi, beside Kepler and Mersenne and just after Copernicus and Galileo, is given a place of the utmost prominence for his contributions to the progress of astronomy and cosmology, and Descartes is not even named.

The 1640s were for both Gassendi and Hobbes the decisive years for the construction of their greatest works. We have already reviewed the “Epicurean” works of Gassendi. We should add that between the middle of 1644 and the end of 1645 there came the redaction of the section of *De vita et doctrina Epicuri* on the “physics” of living and animate beings in which he discussed the treatment of psychological conceptions.<sup>15</sup> In 1645 and 1646 Gassendi wrote the section “Ethica,” whose second book, on the virtues, ends with a chapter on the political virtue par excellence, justice (“De iustitia, iure ac legibus”).<sup>16</sup> In general Gassendi’s “Neo-Epicurean” system is no mere recapitulation of ancient material, but takes account both

of the new scientific philosophy of the seventeenth century and of Christian doctrine. Thus, in the section on “physics,” notions extraneous to Epicureanism appear: the doctrine of the One God, divine providence and creation, the immortality of the spiritual intellect, and so on, while in the psychological and ethical sections Gassendi’s original contributions are more in rapport with contemporary views of psychological mechanism and new ideas about ethics, law, and politics.<sup>17</sup>

Hobbes, in the same decade, the 1640s, put himself into the limelight as a published author of philosophy by works written all or in part after his arrival in France. When he arrived in France he was the author of only one important work, the *Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, which had only circulated in England in manuscript. Thus it was in France that Hobbes composed the works which made him famous as a published author: the *Objectiones* to Descartes’s *Meditationes* (1641), the first edition (semi-anonymous and from a private press) of *De cive* (1642) and the second edition, this time acknowledged (1647)—both were published in Holland with the help of Sorbière—and finally the English version of *Leviathan* (written in France, but published in London in 1651). Another important work written in this period remained unpublished: *De motu, loco et tempore*, a long polemic against Thomas White and in defence of Copernicus and Galileo, giving at the same time the first full formulation of his own “first philosophy” (a work written between winter 1642 and mid-1643). Mersenne probably suggested this work and had it edited for possible publication, for the text, copied accurately by two different scribes, was ready for the press and shows minor corrections and additions in Mersenne’s hand. He also undertook its partial publication by the insertion of parts of it (especially the long chapter on “psychology”) in the preface to the *Ballistica* included in Mersenne’s own *Cogitata physico-mathematica* (1644).<sup>18</sup> This text (*De motu, loco et tempore*) was of crucial importance to the formation of the new “mechanistic” approach to psychology. In presenting it, Mersenne stated that Hobbes had tried to explain every aspect of reality, including “the operations of our faculties,” by appealing solely to “local motion” (*per motum localem*).

Again, in the 1640s their common war against Cartesian metaphysics must have strengthened the bonds between Hobbes and Gassendi. Both opposed crucial aspects of Descartes’ philosophy—the dualism of substances, the recourse to hyperbolic doubt, the appeal to intuition, his

intellectualistic methodology—though their points of view were different: monistic materialism in Hobbes’s case, a more empirical view in Gassendi’s that did not everywhere insist on materialist ontology and even left the door open to an immaterial *intellectus*. Nonetheless we know Hobbes very much approved of the *Disquisitio metaphysica* (1644) in which Gassendi collected his objections to Descartes as a series of “Instantiae” (“points of disagreement”). According to Sorbière’s perhaps too-colorful account, Hobbes thought Gassendi had revealed himself by this polemic as a courageous “hero” who could “chase out the phantoms” that were the more insidious the less they could be grasped. This is a transparent allusion to the incorporeal and immaterial entities of Cartesian metaphysics, which Hobbes throughout his work also argued were good for nothing except ridicule.<sup>19</sup>

If we tally the dates of their respective intellectual biographies with an analysis of their contents, we can see that there is a remarkable convergence between Hobbes and Gassendi on the prerequisite of all their political ideas and the psychological model at the base of law and society. In the same decade and city, both were working out a mechanistic psychology that had a specific practical projection that we shall analyze as a psychology of self-preservation. On this subject Gassendi went far beyond the limits of classical Epicureanism to produce what, indeed, should be called a “Neo-Epicurean” version. He took account of novelties introduced into the scientific conceptions of the seventeenth century, by Hobbes above all, and discussed mind-body interaction from a point of view militantly anti-Cartesian. Considering the date of composition of the sections on psychology of *De vita et doctrina Epicuri* (1644–45), to explain this convergence one need only posit Gassendi’s knowledge of writings he certainly or probably knew—certainly *De cive* and probably the extracts from *De motu, loco et tempore* published by their mutual friend Mersenne in the *Ballistica*.<sup>20</sup>

Later, in what was to become the *Syntagma philosophicum*, Gassendi carved out an exceptional status for the *intellectus*, admitting what he had refused to concede to Descartes in the *Disquisitio*, namely the possibility of pure intellection free of material and imaginative admixture and fixed only on universals, therefore incorporeal.<sup>21</sup> However, with respect to all the “inferior” faculties, from sense perception to memory, from imagination to the most elementary faculty of thought, he created a psychology not just empirical but wholly materialistic, and in no need of *mens* to account for

common psychological phenomena not attaching to pure *intellectus*. Further, despite his general prejudices in favor of atomism, in his psychology Gassendi abandoned, along with the scholastic doctrine of *species* so often held up to scorn by his friend Hobbes,<sup>22</sup> even the specifically Epicurean tenet of the propagation of *eidola* or simulacra by the objects of perception. After citing the opinion of Epicurus that “images or qualities” borne by the tiny atoms of simulacra emitted by objects of perception would penetrate into the sense-organs and from them into the internal faculties of the soul (composed themselves of atoms), Gassendi set this theory aside, and resolved the whole process of sensation into the result of the propagation of motion, transmitted by direct contact or through a medium to the organs of perception, and from there, through the animal spirits in the nerves, to the brain.<sup>23</sup> The Epicurean model, based on the dynamics of atomic compounds (*eidola*) and their impact on the internal organs, along with the doctrine that the soul is diffused throughout the body, was simply abandoned by Gassendi. He affirmed instead the more “modern” model that relied solely on transmitted motion, canalized into the organs of an anatomical-physiological “machine” typical of the “new science” of the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup> For this aspect, there is little difference between Hobbes’s model and Gassendi’s. For both of them, sensation comes from the mechanical action of an object upon sense, consisting solely in motion, with no transport of matter from object to subject. Transport regards only the movement of the animal spirits that run along the nerves of the percipient subject.<sup>25</sup>

By the same token, we find in Gassendi’s psychology of material faculties many motifs that also characterize the “cognitive powers” in Hobbes. We can outline these briefly in five points.

- (a) Both hold that the faculty of perception resides in a material organ—the brain—and not the relevant sense organ. There is no place in their psychology for perception by an incorporeal faculty or for the action of sensory or intellectual forms that act apart from matter. The whole process of sensation is produced by contact and consists in the movement of the animal spirits and its action on the brain. When Gassendi speaks of “the faculty of perception located in the brain” it is clear from the whole context of his discourse that that

“faculty” is no different from the “power” of which Hobbes speaks, meaning a capacity of movement proper to particles of matter in the organs of sense, and in the internal parts of the sentient being.<sup>26</sup>

- (b) Hobbes’s idea that the process of sensation is completed with a reaction (“rebound”) toward the outside—which would explain the apparent external origin of sensory “phantasms”—has a parallel in Gassendi’s psychology. He points out the fact that in the act of perception there is no “immission” into the brain, but rather a “remission” from it. In other words, there is a movement of reaction in the brain—literally, it leaps back (*resilit*)—and this in turn produces a “leap back” (*resultus*) of the spirits toward the outer part of the circuit of the nerves. That would explain why the local *facultas* of the brain places the origin of the sensation not *interius*, where in fact it occurs, but *exterius*, where the sensation comes from.<sup>27</sup> Hobbes’s physiological account is less detailed, following the principle that “the minute and distinct anatomy of the body” is unnecessary to the explanation of a mechanistic psychology.<sup>28</sup> Gassendi instead undertakes such an explanation, both anatomical and more precise, of the mechanics of the *resultus*.<sup>29</sup>
- (c) In Gassendi we find one of the most characteristic notions of Hobbesian physics and psychology: *conatus* (“endeavor”). This appears in Gassendi’s theory of matter to explain why the atoms are *in perpetuo conatu sese veluti extricando*, “in perpetual endeavor to get loose from each other,” so that “from this internal agitation, though imperceptible, effects at length arise that are perceptible,” such as the motion or dissolution of the whole. In Gassendi this account is strictly atomistic and looks particularly to the “weight” of the atoms, the cause of “their intrinsic and internal mobility.” In Hobbes the *conatus* refers to the infinitesimal nature of the movement itself and explains how movement is initiated. Aside from differences due to the presence or absence of an atomistic framework, the concept of *conatus* in both authors has a direct psychological application because it explains the direction of appetite to the thing desired. “This solicitation is the endeavour, or internal beginning of animal motion,” Hobbes writes. Gassendi, always interested in the anatomical and physiological substratum of



- psychological facts, identifies in the animal spirits and their *conatus* the motive power manifest in living beings. In fact, the *conatus* proper to these spirits is far more intense than anything found in the denser and more inert parts of the body.<sup>30</sup>
- (d) Both Hobbes and Gassendi reduce the entire realm of the faculties—from perception to memory, from imagination or *phantasia* to mental discourse—to an effect of the conservation and interrelation of motions, in which all of these faculties must in the final analysis consist. The associationist model of psychology for both of them is based on a material substrate characterized by the balance or imbalance of the movements in which perceptions, appetites, and imaginations really consist. For Gassendi as for Hobbes the “dominant phantasm” is the result of the combination between the different movements that agitate the material spirits.<sup>31</sup>
- (e) Even more clearly in Gassendi, this materialist approach to psychology (with the exception of pure *intellectus*) leads to a mechanistic model of mind wholly founded on the material functioning of the brain. In Hobbes, there is a leap from the movement of the animal spirits to the psychological description of mental events, even though he claims that all our representations (“imaginings”) are but motion. In Gassendi, this lack is filled with an embryonic physical representation of the brain, described as a “paper capable of showing innumerable folds perfectly distinguished in order and succession.” Because for every “fold” there is a corresponding trace left by an idea or an image, i.e., by the material motion of spirits of which the image consists when the motion of the animal spirits runs in sequence over the traces left in the brain, it derives from these an association of phantasms regulated in the sequence ordained by memory. But when their motion is chaotic because of the effects of emotions, a confused and unbalanced sequence of images results.<sup>32</sup> By means of this neurophysiology of cerebral “traces” (similarly found also in the Cartesian theory of the brain) Gassendi traced anatomical support for the materialist doctrine of perception. It is the result of these motions of spirits, of which Hobbes had formulated only general principles.<sup>33</sup>



All convergence of the two authors stops for Gassendi at the threshold of the *intellectus*, which for him, unlike for Hobbes, is immaterial. Furthermore, even if Gassendi's reference point is still the atom, the whole process of perception, memory, and imagination is put in "modern" terms, and breaks both with Epicurus's and Lucretius's views. To explain the coincidence between Hobbes's account and Gassendi's we need not resort to an (improbable) acquaintance with the *Elements of Law*, but to his more probable acquaintance with the summary of Hobbesian psychology printed by Mersenne in the *Ballistica* of 1644, which in turn corresponds to the MS text of *De motu, loco et tempore* of 1642–3.

## CARDIOCENTRISM AND SELF-PRESERVATION

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In the psychology of appetite (in Hobbes's terminology, the "motive powers"), the heart takes the dominant role for both authors. Obviously Harvey's *De motu cordis* (1628) influenced both, and drove Gassendi, for example, to repudiate the Cartesian theory of internal heat as the source of the movement of the heart and to adopt instead a picture of the heart "in the form of a self-driving machine" (*machinalis automatis instar*).<sup>34</sup> For Gassendi the heart is "the center of life, the governing machine whose task it is to protect the whole body, and thus to sense in advance everything that concerns it for good or ill." The animal spirits whose motion is activated by sensation or imagination converge on the heart, and that is where the motion of reaction occurs in which appetite consists. Desire is "a kind of expansion produced by the imagination of a good, and the contraction by an imagination of evil." It is literally the expansion of the heart that produces one's tendency to draw near the good, and its contraction the opposite tendency, to flee or distance oneself from evil.<sup>35</sup>

In adopting this materialist model of emotion, and in the choice of dilation-contraction to explain the movements of pleasure-pain, desire-fear, appetite-avoidance, Gassendi was able to base himself on concepts from the Epicurean tradition: e.g. Torquatus in Cicero, who explains the concept of *hēdonē* by playing on the assonance of the Latin word *laetitia* with *elatio*, exaltation or pleasant expansion of the spirit.<sup>36</sup> Chapter 19 of the *Philosophiae Epicuri syntagma*, on the "affections or passions of the soul,"

after classifying the four general affects in the soul, pleasure-pain, avoidance-desire, identifies “pleasure with enjoyment of good, pain in the suffering of evil.” It then immediately gives a strictly mechanical and materialistic explanation (remember that for Epicurus the soul is literally a “texture” of atoms running through the whole body): “pleasure occurs together with an expansion/effusion of the soul, pain occurs but not without a contraction or abatement of it; so it is not surprising that the soul should dilate itself as far as possible to receive the good into itself and compress itself so as not to receive what is bad.”<sup>37</sup> The basic difference with the Epicurean tradition is that in Gassendi (as already in Hobbes) these motions of pleasure and pain are localized in the heart. By contrast, in Lucretius they occur over the whole extent of the *anima* diffused through the body. Even if they eventually touch the heart, because the *animus* has its refuge there as “a center or root,” their primary *locus* is the *anima*. In Gassendi this *diffusio sive dilatatio* is produced by the atoms of the simulacra of good things, which like tiny chains attract and pull the soul and turn it towards the object of its attraction.<sup>38</sup> The new neurophysiological model that includes a role for the brain, nerves, and animal spirits, and also for the explanation of the emotions by the activity of the heart, abandons as archaic the notion of an *anima diffusa per corpus*. It adopts a more definite theory based on the central role of the heart, made necessary by Harvey and explicitly recognized as such by Hobbes.

This new mechanistic account of appetite has important effects for the structure of Gassendi’s ethics and politics. Formally, at the beginning of his book *De appetitu et affectibus animae*, Gassendi distinguishes between rational appetite, or will, and animal (*brutus*) or irrational appetite. But he adds that in fact “since the soul is bound to the body, just as one’s imagination most often distracts one’s intellect from its true judgment of things, so also the agitations of appetite stir up the imagination and by such means drag the will along together with one’s judgment, while reason and will can achieve nothing, or act much less forcibly.”<sup>39</sup>

The Gassendian psychology of appetite has little in common with Aristotelian doctrine, and pays scarce attention to the key concept of *dianoētikē orexis*, intelligent appetite, which is central to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The explanation of *appetitus* in *De vita et doctrina Epicuri* is mechanistic, and more like Hobbes’s own. Though Gassendi is concerned to reserve a place for immaterial mind, it is especially in emotional life,

when mind acts together with body, that they form a single principle. *Phantasia*, wholly material in Gassendi's view, dominates the entire dynamic of the emotions.<sup>40</sup> Spurred by the imagination, the power of desire is such as to "succeed in pulling along both intellect and reason together with the will and triumph almost by itself."<sup>41</sup>

Even if he did not formally adopt the distinction that was drawn by Hobbes between vital and animal movement, the French philosopher adhered to the cardiocentric approach to emotion that was one of the salient characteristics of *Elements* and *De motu, loco et tempore*. For Gassendi, every appetite results in a movement that impacts the mechanical functioning of the "machina primaria" which is the heart. The general definition of affect ("affect is nothing but an agitated movement of the soul produced in the chest or in another part and aroused by the opinion or sensation of good or evil") is very similar to that found in Hobbes and on which the English philosopher based his important distinction between *voluptas* and *molestia*, both being identified in physical form: the first being "a dilation or expansion of the soul," and the second "an abatement or contraction." For Hobbes as for Gassendi this model has at its center the heart: the *phantasia* of things either pleasing or distressing is imprinted on the brain, from where it spreads to the heart with the motion of the spirits, producing there the effects of "dilation" or "contraction."

For Hobbes, also, the distinction *iucunda/molesta* is relative to the "vital motion"<sup>42</sup> that resides in the heart. The motion of pleasure, *delectatio*, is the principle of animal motion directed to the object and so is called *appetitus*, while unpleasantness starts a motion of flight from the object and is thus called "*aversio & fuga*."<sup>43</sup> On this basis, shared with Gassendi, Hobbes arrived at the more radical conclusion that there was no such thing as an "incorporeal mover" or a spiritual soul.<sup>44</sup>

Gassendi was more cautious in his metaphysics.<sup>45</sup> But for him too the role of the heart is not merely corporeal; it has a more general controlling function. "The heart was not intended solely to be, by its unceasing systole and diastole, the primary cause and principle of all the motions that occur in the body, but is so disposed as to be agitated by opinions of all the good and evil that can happen to the body, and to push it toward the gathering of good and the rejection of the evil." Therefore, there is a relation of "convergence" between the heart and the motions that arrive there. The heart is the

“primary machine” that “animates all the other mechanisms and keeps them stable in their motions.” And thus it is tasked with overseeing the preservation and well-being of the body, “getting what is good and distancing from it what is bad, because its role is to be affected by sensations of good and evil.”<sup>46</sup> The heart is “the principle itself of life and the ruling mechanism whose function is to protect the body as a whole and all its parts.”<sup>47</sup>

On this basis Gassendi founded an ostensible psychology of self-preservation, like that of Hobbes,<sup>48</sup> but still a novelty in Epicurean tradition. The centrality of self-preservation directly affects the concepts of pleasure and pain, on which, for both, human emotion hinges, and thus the motive values to which human beings attend in all their choices.

## ETHICS, HAPPINESS, AND SELF-PRESERVATION

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Usually Hobbes is taken to contradict the Epicureans on two cardinal points. First, (a) with respect to the fear of death. Epicurean philosophy tries to secure for the sage a mental invulnerability that makes him immune to overvaluing the mere duration of pleasure, and thus also of life. Thus, the idea of self-preservation is marginal, though hardly alien, to Epicureanism, but not in Hobbes; as Mitsis writes “self-preservation, not inner peace, is in [Hobbes’s] view our most fundamental goal.”<sup>49</sup> Second, (b) the conception of happiness in Hobbes is dynamic and markedly competitive, always oriented to a seeking for “power”: this promises not just present happiness but future happiness, in a continual series of efforts that ends only with death. Hobbesian “happiness” marks a break with all classical, including Epicurean, ethics, because it is identified not with the enjoyment of a state of mind, but with continuous desire directed toward goals not yet attained. This is clearly to be seen in the famous metaphor of life as a race in which happiness is defined as “always getting ahead of those in front of you.” There is no “final goal;” if it existed it would be the “end” indeed, and the end of desire is only in death (“abandoning the track”).<sup>50</sup> For Hobbes there is no *summum bonum* or absolute good: for Cicero’s Torquatus pleasure is without question the *summum bonum*. Though he recognizes the superiority of mental to sensual pleasures, as Epicurus did, Hobbes no longer identifies

them with mental tranquility or with leisure, as in classical Epicureanism, but with the concept of power.<sup>51</sup>

Both points are right as comparisons with classical Epicureanism, but they only compare Hobbes with ancient Epicureanism, not modern—e.g. Gassendi's—where the distance is not great. Furthermore, (a) does insufficient justice to the importance of *asphaleia*, security, in Epicurus as the preliminary and indispensable condition for wisdom. For (b), Gassendi's general account is much more faithful to Epicurean orthodoxy. He follows the distinction of natural and necessary, natural but unnecessary, and unnatural and unnecessary desires, and the doctrine of the Garden that happiness consists in the absence of bodily pain and in mental tranquility. He agrees with Epicurus against the Cyrenaics that the most important pleasure is not kinetic, but static. He defends Epicurus against those who blamed him for valuing only bodily pleasure, which is not true because of the emphasis he put on peace of mind. Gassendi accepts that there is a *summum bonum*. It is *voluptas*, which is “the restitution of our natural state,” a return to equilibrium, to an atomic cohesion that pain had interrupted.<sup>52</sup>

The distance from Hobbes looks striking. And yet it was precisely during his exile in France that Hobbes abandoned his mono-causal account of the passions, centered on the desire for power, in the *Elements*, for a wider and more balanced view of happiness.<sup>53</sup> In the *Elements* the attractions of power and pre-eminence were so strong that Hobbes compared life to a “race” which “we must suppose to have no other goal, nor other garland, than being foremost.”<sup>54</sup> In the *De motu, loco et tempore*, written in France, Hobbes claims that felicity consists in the desire for good to come,<sup>55</sup> anticipating the definition of it in *Leviathan*, but with certain details that suggest a move towards the views of Gassendi. In *De motu, loco et tempore* Hobbes claims that “felicity” consists in “passing one's life with maximum pleasure, that is, joyousness,” *cum voluptate, id est iucunditate maxima*.<sup>56</sup> However, he thinks that *voluptas* must be further defined, and gives three converging definitions. “It consists in the progress of desire from one good already had to another still to be had.” So happiness is “a continual progression of appetite and hope, from less power to more power” of getting and keeping some desired good. And the most comprehensive definition:

Thus happiness is the pleasure, *iucunditas*, felt in the continual and tranquil progress of desire from power to further power; and the moral tranquility of which ethical philosophers talk is not inertia, or lack of desire, but a tranquil progress from one good already had to another still to be had.<sup>57</sup>

It is notable that in *De motu, loco et tempore* the idea of life as a “race” has completely disappeared in favor of “tranquil progress.” Still, in contrast with the static and ascetic classical definitions, including Epicurus’s “katastematic” pleasure, Hobbes accents the dynamic and progressive view of happiness while, at the same time, emphasizing the “tranquility” of this progress in contrast to the more agonizing and competitive view displayed in the *Elements*. The ethical philosophers Hobbes has in mind are most probably the “moderns,” rather than the ancients, and it is significant that Gassendi too had departed from the static version of happiness praised by the “orthodox” Epicureans. Gassendi was well aware that Epicurus had equated pleasure with *stabilitas*, but in his usual eclectic way takes up again Aristotle’s definition of pleasure as the perceptible motion of soul and body; he rejects the Stoics’ disdain for the *bona corporis*; and he warns that if the sage’s life is no “impetuous torrent” neither is it a “dead and stagnant pond.” No, it is like “the waters of a river that flow silently and calmly;” or a ship has smooth sailing not by “standing immobile in mid-sea,” but when “it travels quickly, calmly, and gently.” Metaphors aside,

Epicurus did not mean by tranquility and the absence of pain merely torpor but rather a state in which all the actions of life are achieved in order and with pleasure.<sup>58</sup>

Gassendi’s eudemonism is not as competitive as in Hobbes’s *Elements*, but shares with him the progressive character of a continual quest for goods to come. They also share the identification of good with pleasure, and both relate the good above all to self-preservation and its extensions into well-being: the *bonum* is always a *bonum sibi*, “good-for-oneself.”<sup>59</sup> And, on the other hand, as we have seen, Hobbes tempers the more agonistic representation of life typical of the *Elements* by transforming it into a “tranquil progress.”

Briefly in the *Elements* and Mersenne’s *excerptum*, at more length in *De motu, loco et tempore*, Hobbes described “this motion, in which consisteth pleasure or pain” as “a solicitation or provocation either to draw near to the thing that pleaseth, or to retire back from the thing that displeaseth.” In



itself, desire is nothing other than “the endeavor or internal beginning of an animal motion” intended to draw near to or retreat from the object, as its image strengthens or impedes the vital movement in the heart.<sup>60</sup> A few years later Gassendi’s treatment is marked by an attempt to accommodate all the scattered physiological details that one can find in Hobbes, especially the cardiocentric account of appetite, in a more definite organic theory equally materialistic and dependent on the movement of the “primary machine.” “It appears that in general pleasures (*voluptates*) and pains (*molestiae*) arise in the heart, soul, and the affected organs,” because “in every living being and in all its senses there is an innate tendency to reach out toward the object appropriate to nourish, delight, and sustain it.” This propensity:

connotes the movement with which the heart, the moment it is struck by the spirits which arise from the thought of pleasure of which the object is cause, expands (so to speak) in that direction and warming the entire bosom reaches out toward the object as if it silently stretched out its arms to draw that to itself.<sup>61</sup>

As usual, Gassendi’s prose is much more colorful and metaphorical, but the meaning is almost identical with Hobbes’s.

This mechanistic psychology is at the base of the concept of self-preservation and the human rights that follow on it.<sup>62</sup> Significantly, the idea of self-preservation first appears in Hobbes when he discusses the “right of nature” in the *Elements*, “that every man may preserve his own life and limbs, with all the power he hath,” for every man seeks and desires the *bonum sibi* and avoids that which is “hurtful” to him, which means primarily that he shuns “most of all that terrible enemy of nature, death.”<sup>63</sup> This doctrine is constantly reaffirmed in the *Elements* as a limit to the ethical subjectivism implied by the Hobbesian theory of the good as that which pleases the individual. In fact, however much the emotions push man to identify as good “that which pleaseth him for the moment,”<sup>64</sup> i.e. an extreme subjective value dependent on the individual and the moment, the perspective of self-preservation introduces, by contrast, a more general and stable criterion. It must provide for the future, with the series of means on which this self-preservation depends, and this is the one and only rational parameter to which moral choice should look:



And therefore he that foreseeeth the whole way to his preservation (which is the end that every one by nature aimeth at) must also call this good, and the contrary evil. And this is that good and evil, which not every man in passion calleth so, but all men by reason. And therefore the fulfilling of all these laws is good in reason, and the breaking of them evil.<sup>65</sup>

*De cive* is yet more explicit in drawing the juridical consequences of “self-preservation.” Here also Hobbes holds that everyone must desire the “good for himself,” and shun the “bad for himself” and especially the ultimate evil (*maximum malorum naturalium*), death. Men shun this with a “natural necessity not less than that which bears a rock downwards,” *necessitate quadam naturae, non minore quam qua fertur lapis deorsum*. It is implied that while there is no sense to the words “highest good”—since each understands and feels that in his own way—the meaning of the *summum malum* is clear and the same for all. Thus, he goes on, it is not contrary to “right reason,” *non contra rectam rationem*, to attempt to defend and preserve oneself in body and limb, *ut a morte et doloribus proprium corpus et membra defendet, conservetque*. It is here that Hobbes brings in the right to self-preservation, as in the *Elements*, but in *De cive* he underlines that this right must be exercised according to the “right reason.”<sup>66</sup> The right to the true end is reflected in a right to the means that achieve this end and it is up to reason to calculate these means.<sup>67</sup>

If we look at the development of this political doctrine in Gassendi’s “De iustitia,” written three or four years after the first edition of *De cive*, or in the commentary on Epicurus’s *Kyriai Doxai*, it is easy to show that here Gassendi is closer to Hobbes’s ethics than to Epicurean “orthodoxy.” For Gassendi, self-preservation overrides the moral hierarchy of desires and goods in Epicurean ethics. There, factors like the impulse to self-preservation and the acquisitive impulse that leads to private property were preliminary and to some extent neutral, if not altogether negative, with respect to the ethical distinctions between pleasures which were vital to Epicurean “wisdom.” By contrast, Gassendi assigns the dominant role even in social life to self-interest (*philautia*) and the search for pleasure in general (*philēdonia*)—two perfectly “natural” motives, because “there is no one who would do anything except for himself or his own pleasure.” Even behavior apparently dictated by altruistic considerations—for example self-sacrifice for family, group, or homeland—implies a purpose, however mediated, that is finally dictated by self-love.<sup>68</sup> Self-interest is always a given, and includes both egoistic behavior proper, and also that which

appears altruistic, being in reality dictated by a peculiar form of self-love that enjoys being praised by others for “generous” actions. “The nature of the good consists in directing the appetites to love oneself and care for oneself.”<sup>69</sup> Christian love of God, according to Gassendi, also normally proceeds from interest in reward and retribution; disinterested love is “above nature.”<sup>70</sup> The reduction of human affections to *philautia* is even more evident in the field of law and politics, where *voluptas* is rather replaced by the useful (*utile, commodum*) and security (*securitas*). So also in *De cive*, according to Hobbes: *in statu naturae mensuram iuris esse utilitatem*, “in the state of nature the measure of law (right) is utility.”<sup>71</sup>

In politics, self-preservation is so important to Gassendi that he makes it not just a right, but also a duty. In defining *ius naturae primum*, primary natural law, which is for the human being *quasi solitarius et in purae naturae statu*, by himself and before any social contract has been made, Gassendi’s formulation rephrases that of *De cive* with its precise formulation of right-to-end and right-to-means. “From man’s existence he derives the power of self-defense and self-preservation, and therefore of availing himself of all necessary means suitable to those ends.” Other clearly Hobbesian formulas are those which explain the consequences of this right to self-preservation in the state of nature, where all have the “right” to all: no “primal injustice” exists before the contracts have been made, and have established this or that right as capable of being legally sanctioned. The final result of the state of nature for Gassendi, as for Hobbes, was a situation of unending conflict, actual or potential. To the free dynamic of *appetitiones*, there corresponds a state of absolute insecurity.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, in considering *ius naturale* as *lex naturae*, Gassendi reduces the four primal precepts of “natural law” to three different articulations of the duty of self-preservation, plus an obligation to sociality. (a) The first law is a reinstatement of the definition of the good: “that each should pursue what is good, useful, and pleasant and shun what is bad, harmful, and unpleasant.” (b) The second is explained as purely selfish, and takes the priority of self-preservation as a given: “that each should love himself more than all others, that he should prefer the good for himself to the good of another.”<sup>73</sup> (c) The third law even more explicitly inculcates the imperative of self-preservation: “that each should strive for the protection of life and the free use of his members, his senses, and all his faculties.” (d) The fourth

“natural law” introduces a different dimension, the obligation to social life (“and finally, that they should be disposed to associate with each other and to maintain their society”), but, as we shall see, this axiom too originates in considerations of self-interest and utility, both personal and collective.<sup>74</sup>

## GASSENDI AND THE NEO-EPICUREAN THEORY OF RIGHT: JUSTICE, UTILITY, AND CONTRACT

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On the basis of these axioms, Gassendi worked out a Neo-Epicurean theory of law and justice that had two principal aims. (1) To free classical Epicureanism of the accusation, common already in antiquity, of being apolitical or, worse, anti-political in that its preoccupation with pleasure or tranquility of mind would remove its adherents from participation in public life. (2) To integrate Epicurean legal theory into the history of natural law, by showing how the principle of “utility” could be an acceptable basis for modern politics. In pursuing these aims Gassendi took account of parallel developments in Hobbes who reacted to these adaptations and compromises, with the result that on some points Hobbes himself came closer (though without saying so) to the original spirit of Epicurean legal theory than Gassendi himself.

Gassendi’s principal sources were three: above all, *KD* 31–38; the long excerpt from Hermarchus reported by Porphyry in *De abstinence* 1.7–12; and finally Lucretius, Book 5. The translation and commentary on the *Kyriai Doxai* were published as an appendix to the *Animadversiones* and not repeated, unfortunately, in the definitive edition of the *Syntagma philosophicum*.<sup>75</sup> this accident too contributed to the limited impact of Neo-Epicurean juridical and political theory, as compared to the impact of its physics on seventeenth-century atomism.

As for *KD* 31–38, central to Epicurus’s text and Gassendi’s interpretation are three fundamental notions: (a) the *dikaion* (right or just), (b) the *sympheron* (useful), and (c) *synthēkē* (the contract).

(a) *Dikaion*. The general principle of Epicurean legal thought is established in *KD* 31. Gassendi in his translation adds interpolations (here given in italics) that are already a first attempt at interpretation:

The right (*ius*) or the just (*iustum*) by nature is the countersign of the useful (*tessera utilitatis*) or of that utility which men propose to themselves by common agreement, to not damage each other nor be damaged, so as to live in security: something everyone wishes to do, following nature as their guide.<sup>76</sup>

Epicurus's original formulation is shorter: "nature's justice (τὸ τῆς φύσεως δίκαιον) is a token of benefit (σύμβολον τοῦ συμφέροντος) toward not harming each other and not being harmed."

The concision of this passage has given rise to conflicting opinions between scholars, ranging between two extremes represented by Robert Philippson and Reimar Müller. Philippson held that Epicurean *nomos* existed by nature; Müller, that Epicurus had risen above the antithesis *nomos-physis*, nature/convention, and that Epicurean justice would indeed depend on human nature, but could not be part of human life *eo ipso*, since it also needs, to enter into use, the artificial stipulation of a contract.<sup>77</sup>

It appears Gassendi noticed the ambiguity of this text, which could be read either as favoring naturalism or conventionalism. His interpolations refer to "nature as guide" to show that law is the product of a convention which is not arbitrary but instituted according to nature, yet not something given, *tout court*, by nature. Furthermore, against the classical and medieval tradition of natural law, which insisted on its normative and legislative character, Gassendi interprets *ius*, insofar as it is *ius naturale*, as simply *subjective right for the contracting parties* and limited to expressing "ownership and power over something in particular," *dominium et facultas in aliquid*. For Gassendi, as for Hobbes, this reflects the right of all to all in the state of nature, before the mine/thine distinction came about.

Though this was already at least implicit in Epicurean sources, a notion of subjective rights had not been given birth in classical times, thus the moderns much deepened the concept of individual rights. It is Gassendi's great achievement to have grafted onto the "natural right" or "right according to nature" of Epicurus a representation of the original rights of persons in which the doctrine of the Roman jurists is mixed together with an image of the state of nature much like Hobbes's. In this picture, the function of right is important. It assists self-preservation by instituting a

reciprocal prohibition against mutual harm, and Gassendi is quick to put into sight the value of security (*securitas*).<sup>78</sup> The “just” is thus divested of any connection with normative *values* and is put, rather, into the perspective of utilitarian *means*. Now it is no longer tasked with realizing an ethical paradigm of “the common good,” but only with contributing to external conditions indispensable to sociability: above all, preservation of life and security. Thus the political order loses the connotations of communal ethics that characterized it in Aristotle, the scholastics, and also in the Stoic view revived by Grotius.

(b) *Sympheron*. Judged by its content, Epicurean right is defined by what is “useful.” This constitutes the main rule for recognizing the general nature of the right, its *prolēpsis* or *praenotio* (as Gassendi calls it). But since utility varies by place, time, and circumstance, it follows that the just is equally mutable. *KD* 36 makes clear that, although there is in theory a justice “common and equal for all” to the extent it represents “the useful in reciprocal relations,” this represents only a form of theoretical reasoning whose actual results vary according to “the characteristics of various places and the variety of causal principles from which they come.” It follows that “one and the same thing is not just for all men.”<sup>79</sup> As Gassendi also sees, this Epicurean teaching is incompatible with the universalism typical of the Stoic-Christian tradition of theory of right. As Victor Goldschmidt said, according to Epicurus “it belongs to the nature (to the essence) of law to be positive;”<sup>80</sup> and as Gassendi put it in his commentary on *KD* 31:

Only the right of society, that is, what is called civil law by the citizens, is right in the true sense, as it expressed in the covenants, namely in laws in the proper sense of the word, to whose prescriptions they that belong to the same society give obedience, because they are directed to the common good and common utility of all the contracting parties.<sup>81</sup>

(c) *Synthēkē*. In spite of the reference to “natural right” in *KD* 31 (or, more correctly translated, “right by nature”), Epicurean legal thinking is conventionalist. There exists no right antecedent to, or independent of, the conventions to which the makers of the social contract accede. Therefore, there can be no relationships involving justice between animals, between men and animals, or with savage peoples, as they have no language in common to covenant. In all these cases there has never been any social

contract, as *KD* 32 puts it, and thus no “rights” are in force. Gassendi is so aware of this conventionalist nucleus of Epicurean theory that, when he tries to explain the notion of *tessera utilitatis* in *KD* 31, he admits he feels tempted to translate the Greek σύμβολον τοῦ συμφέροντος in conventionalist terms as “a contract agreed to concerning utility,” in false analogy with similar meanings of σύμβολον in Demosthenes, Isaeus, and Aristotle who used this word to mean “contract.”<sup>82</sup> It is just because of this connection with the social contract that the *iustum naturale* for Gassendi is rather a “right according to nature” than a “right of nature” in the sense current in natural law theories. *Ius* in the strict sense is limited to furnishing the premises for agreement (aspiration to self-preservation, equality in the reciprocal claims, free exercise of one’s own faculties) which translate into the actual terms of the social contract.<sup>83</sup> Right and the contract have as their sole purpose the subjective interests of individuals—their “utility,” their “not being harmed,” etc. Also, simply “exercising the power to do or make use of something” is not yet a right in the full sense until it is limited, defined, and guaranteed by means of an explicit and ratified law.<sup>84</sup> Though Gassendi had relied on the authority of the Roman jurists to soften the impact of this linking of “natural right” to utility and convention, he could not conceal the explosive effects of Epicurean theory. The text of the *KD* would not let him. A series of terse *doxai* draws out all the consequences of equating conventionalist utilitarianism with the theory of justice. *KD* 32: “there is neither justice nor injustice” for animals that have no language and cannot “draw up contracts” and the same is true “for all those peoples who did not wish and were unable to make contracts neither to harm nor be harmed.”<sup>85</sup> *KD* 33 infers from this that justice “is not something existent in itself” but only “in reciprocal relations” and—Gassendi adds—cannot be found “in man taken in isolation” but only in “the mutual associations of mankind.”<sup>86</sup>

## MAJOR INNOVATIONS OF GASSENDI’S POLITICAL THEORY

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The break with the Stoic-Christian tradition was obvious. Many seventeenth-century writers held it to be tantamount to a sceptical denial of the universality of natural law, even of its very existence. Grotius had already classed, along with a sceptic like Carneades, the Epicurean poet Horace and his famous assertion (S. 1.3.96) that “*Utilitas* is as if the ‘mother’ of justice and equity.” Grotius held that the origin of society could not depend on its utility to the contracting parties, but on an innate and rational norm. By *oikeiōsis* (fellow-feeling, as if the partner was quasi-familial) all men severally are united to the whole race, and that “nature” led us to create society, even where that was neither necessary nor useful to the needs of individuals.<sup>87</sup> Later on, the sceptical *libertin érudit* La Mothe Le Vayer pointed as a matter of course to Epicurus in doubting the existence of a moral standard or an objective politics.<sup>88</sup>

Now, there is clearly an echo of these discussions in Gassendi’s commentary on the *KD*, and in the chapter of the *Syntagma* “De iustitia” written concurrently with it. Gassendi defends three crucial points.

(a) *Utilitarianism*. Gassendi is the first thinker since Valla—and long before Helvétius and Bentham—to found law on “utility,” reviving for modern ethical and political thought a key notion of classical Epicureanism (though not in the same way as his eighteenth- and nineteenth-century successors). In the commentary on *KD* 31, Gassendi finds in “utility” the universal goal of the *ius gentium* insofar as that coincides with “the dictate of Nature as to what is useful—that is convenient and good.”<sup>89</sup> In “De iustitia” Gassendi undertakes an explicit deduction of right from “utility,” *deducere [ius] ab utilitate*, by which he demonstrates the coherence between Epicurean doctrine and the principles of natural right. In his reading, Epicurus would have been concerned not to separate right from, but to conjoin it with, human nature. That was exactly why he made use “of utility, the binding force most in agreement with nature.” Thus the Epicurean criterion, utility, lends itself—Gassendi argues—to a unification of the three distinct categories, *ius naturale*, *ius gentium*, *ius civile*, into which right had been divided ever since Roman times.<sup>90</sup> This insistence on the fundamental value of utility instead of mutual benevolence, whether altruistic or social, sets Gassendi off from Aristotelian, scholastic, and Neo-Stoic theorists.



It is also notable that, against the recurring criticism of Epicurean self-love, *philautia*, as mere pettiness and egoism, Gassendi holds that one should measure utility not by the sheer good of the individual, but by the public good—*populi utilitas*, *communis utilitas*—at least once the *civitas* has been set up. Of course the fact remains that, when a Neo-Epicurean like Gassendi talks of “public good,” he is merely thinking of it as the sum of the good done to people one by one, given that pleasure is defined as a strictly individual good.<sup>91</sup> He never approaches the solution of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Utilitarianism—the greater happiness of, or usefulness to, the greatest number of people. His focus is always centered on the individual, even when it is included in a community.

(b) *Blending naturalism with conventionalism*. It has been much discussed then and now whether Epicurean right was completely conventionalist. Certainly Gassendi’s was not (maybe Hobbes’s was, despite his appeal to natural law).<sup>92</sup> Already the commentary on *KD* 32 is open to a theory by which, even where there is no explicit contract, there would still be a minimum of obligations which would exist above and beyond the stipulations of convention, and lead a man to “seek out what would or would not befit him as a human being,” for example in dealing with animals or savages. That would make it possible to discover a rational norm wherever prescriptive law is not in force. To the objection that this norm would not be a law properly so-called, *lex perfecta*, because sanctioned by no penalty, Gassendi answers that even in the absence of coercive power (*vis cogens*), the obligation dictated by law would at least be “in accord with nature,” *secundum naturam*, insofar as it would interpret “the dictate of reason,” *rationis dictamen*.<sup>93</sup> For this attempt to reconcile Epicureanism with natural law, Gassendi gets leverage from Epicurus’s having himself set limits to his own juridical conventionalism. For even to him a contract is artificial, but not arbitrary: it always corresponds to the *prolēpsis* of justice as to the reciprocal advantage of the contractors. As Eric Brown says:

Epicurus recognizes limitations on the *substance* on the convention, however it is formed: no agreement about right and wrong that fails to benefit reciprocal community defines what is just. So, justice must have some reality independent of what any community has agreed.<sup>94</sup>

Therefore, while the form of the contract is conventional, its content is rational and corresponds to *utile* dictated by reason, and therefore also to human nature. Conventionalism and utilitarian naturalism correct and limit each other mutually.

Doubts have been expressed about whether it is possible to reconcile the Epicurean idea of *synthēkē* with that of the social contract found in Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. It seems Epicurus envisaged “a formal or abstract agreement, presupposed by legislative action, and not a personal act that each of the parties, and eventually every citizen, must consciously ratify.”<sup>95</sup> Gassendi introduces the idea of an “implicit” contract, founded on rational consensus, or at least on “the silent consent of all men who obey their own reasoning.” However, he maintains an idea that will be typical of the “moderns” even while it is close to Epicurean tradition: juridical and political regulation is not the instinctive and immediate product of *physis*. It requires further reflection on the utility of the rules that guarantee self-preservation: the “utilitarian calculus,” *epilogismos tou chrēsismou*. What Müller has said of Epicurus is true also of Gassendi: “law is conformable to Nature to the extent it expresses utility”<sup>96</sup> and this utility corresponds to the natural structure of human needs. These, however, must be “calculated” by reason, and directed, by means of the contract, to the constituting of a society.

(c) *Recovering law of nature*. The concept of “law of nature” that Gassendi utilizes in dealing with “self-preservation” is rather extraneous to classical Epicurean legal thought and derives from medieval and later theory. It is interesting, however, that it is formulated in terms that make it an exercise of the Epicurean virtue of “prudence”—that is, the long-term evaluation of “pleasures” and their consequences in terms of utility or harm. As we have seen, to the three primal precepts of natural law that express in the imperative what the Epicurean lexicon of justice (*dikaion*) had expressed permissively, there is added by Gassendi a fourth, explicitly political prescription: it recommends social relations between mankind that supply the needs of each. This opens the way for contracts, obligations, and laws without which social and political life cannot exist. For Gassendi, there is no solution in continuity between the selfish interests of individuals and their entrance into community. Because the laws create utility for each, it follows “that it is according to nature for everyone to respect and keep

inviolable the laws of society, and to love the common good, where, it is understood, also one's personal good is included." In the final analysis, the law of nature is founded on the self-interested principle of reciprocity, and can be summarized in the commandment "do not do that to others which you would not have others do to you," to which all social norms can be reduced. "Put yourself in another's place" is the best way to understand "what one ought and ought not to do."<sup>97</sup> By appealing to reciprocity, Gassendi supports an optimistic approach which encourages convergence between individual and collective "utility." In the *Syntagma* he refuses to admit that the interests of the individual, if well understood, can be taken apart from those of the society, or that the community can compromise the interests of the individual. His optimism is thoroughly "naturalistic" even when it is expressed with mechanistic metaphors:

Man is created by nature a sociable animal . . . and to render him more loving and observant of society, nature has contrived (*machinata natura est*) a reciprocal need of help, such that when one asked from another the help he needed, he obtained it the more easily because in his turn he could offer it back to that other.<sup>98</sup>

Elsewhere Gassendi attributes directly to God as *artifex naturae* the farsightedness of having created *by* pleasure every *operatio* necessary to the propagation and preservation of life.<sup>99</sup>

In this way Gassendi believes he has reconciled the *physeōs dikaion* of *KD* 31 with the tradition of natural law. For this reason he reacts against Epicurus's clear denial in *KD* 33 that "justice exists by itself," and claims this is unacceptable because "the same dictate of reason" establishes between men "an obligation in accord with nature," even though it is limited to a few norms only (like the rule of "attack no one unless attacked") and in the end to one single rule, that of reciprocity ("do not unto others . . .").<sup>100</sup>

## THREE STAGES IN THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN HOBBS AND GASSENDI: IS MAN MEANT FROM BIRTH FOR SOCIETY?

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However tempered by the key role accorded to friendship<sup>101</sup> (sometimes, even, with still much debated touches of altruism), and though it emphasized the fact that a life of pleasure ought also to be a virtuous life, that is, temperate, brave, prudent, and just,<sup>102</sup> the foundation of society by Epicurus on a self-interested utilitarian calculus, not on a metaphysical idea of justice like Plato's, or on a deeper human affinity (Stoic *oikeiōsis*), or on the political nature of man (like in Aristotle), was a scandal to all the other ancient philosophies. It was aggravated by Epicurus's commendation of abstention from active political life, and his praise of a life private and hidden from notice, except for the bonds of "friendship," which were patently not those of the *polis* or *res publica*. There arose the portrait of an Epicurus who was the enemy of natural sociability: as Lactantius summed it up, *dicit Epicurus . . . nullam esse humanam societatem, sibi que quemque consulere*.<sup>103</sup> This denial of natural sociability as essential or spontaneous to man reappeared with force in the seventeenth century in the work of Hobbes, and provoked Gassendi to rethink his Epicurean "politics."<sup>104</sup> Hobbes replied—at least implicitly—to Gassendi's objections on this key point. We may reconstruct their dialogue in three stages:

- (a) In the first edition of *De cive* (1642) Hobbes attacked the Aristotelian doctrine of man as a political animal (*zōion politikon*) by nature, explicitly referring to Aristotle.<sup>105</sup> But two long passages<sup>106</sup> can be read as reflections, positive and negative, on themes of the Epicurean tradition. This relationship with Epicureanism can be summarized in three main points. First, while it is typically Epicurean to hold that consent to the contract is a sufficient foundation for living in society, so that laws are equated with private contracts, Hobbes considers both notions errors.<sup>107</sup> He could have seen them currently in Gassendi's commentary on the *KD*, or in "De iustitia."<sup>108</sup> Second, while he rejects the doctrine of natural sociability, Hobbes seems to approve a more realistic form of association based on considerations of self-interest. He lists these under two heads: honor and power on the one side, utility and reciprocal need on the other. Now the second pair is as typically Epicurean as the first is typically Hobbesian. Again, his opposition of self-love to the love of one's fellows is in line with Gassendi's

and Epicurus's view of *philautia*. Hobbes could well have seen it made into a positive value by Gassendi in circulating manuscripts. Third, Hobbes argues that, however considerable the accumulated force of reciprocal need and however much the Epicureans had insisted on the utility of social feelings, these were never sufficient to quench the temptation to abuse power because the "increase of things useful to life" can be made easier to obtain "by dominion over others rather than by entering into society with them." Hobbes began a debate with Gassendi over the basic assumptions I have here outlined in summary form.

- (b) It is significant that this is precisely the argument Gassendi takes up in writings datable to 1646—"De iustitia" and the commentary on the *KD*—four years after the first edition of *De cive*. This is stage two of the dialogue. In fact, Gassendi re-elaborated his Neo-Epicurean doctrine in view of Hobbes's objection. Struck by the power of Hobbes's realism, Gassendi introduced into his text a vision of the state of nature that gives full place to aggression between human beings, never quite so fully acknowledged in classical Epicureanism.<sup>109</sup> At the same time, Gassendi reacted both to the "anti-political" reading of classical Epicureanism and to Hobbes's thesis (in *De cive*) that in the state of nature there could be no "natural justice" in the true sense, because there was as yet no contract.<sup>110</sup> Gassendi's Neo-Epicureanism thus became a sort of *via media* between the true Epicurus and Hobbes. In "De iustitia" Gassendi distinguishes between *ius primum*, primary right, which belongs to the isolated individual, and *ius secundum*, secondary right, belonging to man in society. Under primary right, the condition of man—"solitary and in the state of pure nature"—is much like Hobbes's account of it. Gassendi quotes Lucretius Book 5 in support: the fundamental norm of secondary right was *inter se nec laedere nec violari*, neither to harm nor be harmed among one another, a literal translation from *KD* 31. Appealing next to the fragment of Hermarchus on the origins of right, he traces a "genealogy" of political institutions by which the renunciation of aggression between individuals is the first rule instituted by the "legislators" for the primary utility of society. The "calculus" or

reckoning of utility induced them to forbid homicide and persuade their peoples of the profitability of obeying this rule.

“Secondary” right looks to the human condition “insofar as man is sociable and finds himself in a modified state of nature.” At that level sociality is essential to man, who “is part of society and wishes to be so.” Social union is now an indispensable convenience to supply the needs of individuals. In that context Gassendi did not hesitate to re-use the Aristotelian formula *zōion politikon*. “Thus man is created by nature a sociable animal, so that he might enjoy goods useful to lift him out of need, thanks to this [secondary] right.”<sup>111</sup> That is also the origin of “contracts,” without which “there can be no safe association.” The laws of association are to be called “secondary,” as depending on the first contracts, but, he adds, can also be called “natural,” since, as they appeal to a natural need, “they originate from nature and are conformable to its intentions.” Returning to his exegesis of *KD* 31, he argues that “primary right” is like a “faculty,” *facultas*:

This is apparently what Epicurus had in mind when he said that natural right consists just in the contracts, or rather in that faculty [of association] they render possible. Indeed, it seems he might have agreed that one ought to call a “faculty,” not a right, that right which we have called primary.<sup>112</sup>

In the light of “secondary right” the condition of primal man appears to be more like “a supposition or fiction” than a reality, since “the society of mankind is as ancient as their origin.” Sociality corresponds to their nature as intelligent beings who understand “that there can be among them no safe association that is not consolidated by contract and reciprocal convention.”<sup>113</sup>

Though characterized not by altruism but self-interest and the calculus of reciprocal convenience, this sociability that comes about “under the guidance of nature” is thus not “accidental” as in Hobbes, but can be called “natural,” if only in the Epicurean and not the Aristotelian sense. As if to defend against any accusation of too superficial a view of human nature, Gassendi collects all the *testimonia*—especially Epicurean—that speak for an authentic “community of nature” among mankind. However, there is nothing of Stoic *oikeiōsis* there: that is too elevated and abstract. Rather, we find the “natural community” of man with man produced by “likeness of

body and soul.”<sup>114</sup> Hermarchus had appealed to this likeness, in the fragment in Porphyry, to explain *as absolute* the prohibition against killing another man introduced by the primal lawgivers. Of course, in the text of Hermarchus, even this is explained immediately by the statement that, in fact, “the principal reason” for indignation against homicide is its not being “useful for the general arrangement (*systasis*) of life.” The long passage of Hermarchus is taken up in “De iustitia” again from a utilitarian point of view with pride of place belonging in social life to the calculus of utility, *epilogismos tou chrēsīmou* (Gassendi: *ad considerandum quid utile foret*). This by itself would have sufficed to regulate behavior, without laws (Hermarchus claimed), “had all been able to see and to remember what was useful.”<sup>115</sup>

Gassendi wishes to distinguish his own views on “reciprocal natural community, which it seems Epicurus denied was general among mankind,” also from the opposite radical view taken by *De cive* of the immediate distrust and hostility supposedly characterizing human relations. Gassendi refutes this latter idea, and maintains that even for Epicureans there is a kind of human common share which is not abstract but rooted in facts of ordinary experience: the use of reason, the quest for utility, and the need to avoid or suffer aggressive behavior, on which this sort of limited “community of nature” is based.

This revival of the notion of man as a “sociable animal” in an Epicurean context is not the same as a simple re-working of the *politikon zōion* of Aristotelian tradition. It attempts to realize a synthesis in political theory of egoistic and utilitarian aspects with communitarian aspects. Gassendi uses the naturalism of Epicureanism itself, which had its own way of overcoming the *physis-nomos* antithesis, both in refuting Hobbesian artificialism, and as a corrective to Aristotelian political theory.

(c) We have arrived at stage three of the dialogue between Hobbes and Gassendi. The latter’s response (not yet printed) to the first edition of *De cive* could not pass unnoticed by Hobbes and we have a clear evidence of this. As the second edition of *De cive* (1647) was going to press, and shortly after the composition of Gassendi’s “De iustitia,” Hobbes added a series of “*annotationes*.” Clearly, those to “Libertas” I 2 mentioned above<sup>116</sup> deal with Gassendi’s arguments against Hobbes’s claim that “man is not born for



society by birth.” Hobbes took special note of arguments set out in “De iustitia”: that we live in a society already set up to the point that the “state of nature” appears a “fiction”; that all men “desire association and to share converse” (*appetere congressum et colloquia mutua*). In acknowledging the “natural” desire of association, Hobbes goes so far as to echo the formulas with which Gassendi had described *ius humanum* and its powerful tendency to favor sociability. As if echoing the *appetitus societatis* of Gassendi, Hobbes says:

That it is true indeed, that to Man, by nature, or as Man, that is, as soone as he is born, Solitude is an enemy . . . wherefore I deny not that men (even nature compelling) desire to come together.<sup>117</sup>

Association is necessary both for life, *ad vivendum*, and for living well, *ad bene vivendum*. So that instead of starting from a denial of natural sociability (as he had done in the first edition of *De cive*) Hobbes says such a denial might be judged “a wonderful kind of stupidity,” *mira stupiditas*, “a stumbling block before the reader.” In acknowledging this fact, Hobbes seems to concede to Gassendi a more positive view of human sociality.

For Hobbes, nonetheless, what is at stake is not the concession to matters of fact, but the understanding of what political unions should really be. For him, “civil societies,” *societates civiles*, are not “mere meetings,” *congressus*, but “Bonds,” *foedera*, that require “faiths and Compacts,” whose power (*vis*) remains unknown to “children” and “fooles.” He therefore argues “civil society” is not a gift of birth. Even among adults the “profit,” *utilitas*, of “compacts” is unknown to those without experience of the damage caused by lack of them. Thus, not even the concession—to Gassendi—that in fact, societies always pre-exist individuals, could be a disproof of the thesis that political bonds are non-natural. Whether children or non-reflective adults, all or most of mankind prove Hobbes’s axiom *Hominem ad Societatem aptum non esse natum*. Infants “are born unapt for Society,” *ad societatem inepti nati*, since they have to learn to live politically. As for adults the great majority remain in this state of political ineptitude “either through defect of mind, or want of education,” *vel morbo animi vel defectu disciplinae*. Since both infants and adults possess “a human nature,” there is the proof that having one does not per se make one fit for society. At most, one can say that the appetite for human connection belongs to nature, as Gassendi argued, but a good outcome of this desire

depends not on nature but *disciplina*, “education.” So, it is the result of an artifice that goes beyond any natural given.<sup>118</sup>

The second annotation by Hobbes follows logically from the first. The 1642 text had said that “the original of all great, and lasting Societies, consisted not in the mutual good will men had towards each other,” *non a mutua hominum beneuolentia*, “but in the mutual fear,” *a mutuo metu*, “they had of each other.”<sup>119</sup> In the 1647 annotation Hobbes explains what this *mutuus metus* means. It is not to be understood as “terror” or “flight”—that would render association impossible—but rather as “foresight of future evil,” which might generate “flight,” but principally makes human beings “to distrust, suspect, take heed.” They think both that men aim at *bonum sibi*, yet Gassendi’s eudemonistic utilitarianism is less competitive and more optimistic about human spontaneous cooperation. To drive men towards peace and contract, Hobbes uses the lever of a “sad” passion: fear. This is certainly a cause of distrust that can break out into preventive aggression; yet the same passion can actually induce mankind to perform a rational calculus regarding the dangers and harms of aggression, which, in turn, opens a way to peace by mutual agreement. For Gassendi, by contrast, *metus* is not the primary or sole motive that acts in social life. It is equalled in importance by *spes*, hope.

## CONCLUSION: UTILITY VS. SOVEREIGNTY

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The two thinkers differ even more on the role of *utilitas*. Though he recognizes the value of utility in the creation of social bonds, Hobbes does not share Gassendi’s optimism about a purely utilitarian conception of social norms. He holds, as we saw, that if the useful, *commoda*, can be augmented by mutual aid, *mutua ope*, this is not sufficient in itself to make cooperation stable and permanent. In fact, the vainglorious (men who delude themselves by their supposed superiority) or the arrogant (who are indisposed to admit equality with others) can imagine themselves winning any conflict, and appropriating the greater part of the benefits, by recourse to being high-handed, which would be more efficacious and advantageous (for them) than cooperation and promise-keeping. For Hobbes the coercive role of sovereignty ought logically to prevail over the immediate, short term

utilitarian calculus. Sovereign power does not rest on that calculus, even though it opens the way for it to work effectively. So, the calculus presupposes the existence of sovereign power, unlike what Gassendi could read in the Hermarchus fragment. There the calculus is on the same plane as the penalties inflicted by the lawgiver that enforce it, and these penalties would themselves be needless in a state of ideal human rationality.

The authority of the “legislators of old” in Hermarchus and Gassendi not only comes from below, but in every aspect of its action rests on the direct utilitarian advantage of those who make a contract. It is supported solely by the recognition of its own “utility” by those subject to it, who are moreover encouraged to revise at any time their “calculus” of utilities—for *KD* 38 lays it down that the “justice” of the laws varies, as the “circumstances” (in time and place) that impinge on their “utility” vary. Hobbesian sovereignty, though it too originates in the utilitarian calculus and the voluntary decision of the citizens through the social contract, once established, no longer depends for its exercise on any further calculation by them. To Hobbes this sort of continuous utilitarian calculation, encouraged by Hermarchus and Gassendi even after the institution of sovereignty, would in the end be classed with the changeable, self-interested, and emotional judgments of individuals, and would make a basis too unstable and precarious for the holding of sovereign authority. If there is, as Hobbes also believes, a “calculus” of the chances of survival when leaving the state of nature and contracting the political covenant, the basic utility of self-preservation comes first and before the particular norms that establish merely contingent kinds of utility. It regards subjects’ primary condition. It is a calculus of the utility of obedience for self-preservation, that is the utility of submitting oneself to the sovereign to get safety and peace. After this basic decision that is “useful” to self-preservation, it is authority, not the individual, that determines the ways of “living” and “living well,” thus fixing the contingent “utilities” of common life according to the laws established by the sovereign. Of course, it is essential to *Leviathan* that the supreme utility, peace and self-preservation, for which the state was instituted, be protected. However, in the actual practice of government, the modalities in which *commodum* and its consequences take form are to be calculated and established not by individuals, but by the sovereign. Obviously, utility and its consideration are present in the basic exchange that occurs before the birth of the Commonwealth, i.e. the exchange between protection and

obedience; yet, after the pact is made, it is the authority of the sovereign that decides the utility of single norms and acts.

The utility of peace and social life falls under individual judgment only in two cases: in founding, and in terminating, the State. At the moment of founding, union and submission are created. At the moment of dissolving, when the sovereign is shown to be incapable of protecting its subjects, the subjects return to the state of nature, where each is judge of the means of his own self-preservation. As long as the State is there, the sovereign assumes the judgment of what is useful or harmful to the “life” of the Commonwealth, and thus to the existence and well-being of its subjects. For Hobbes, the sovereign reserves to himself the functions of securing the *dieta* (resources) of the State, establishing “where, with whom and in what commerce can occur,” laying down the laws of institution and transfer of property, marriage and family regulations, and so on. Therefore, for its concrete exercise to be effective, sovereign power is founded in *Leviathan* on a logic of authority that goes beyond mere *consensio*, consensus, or the “conspiracy of many wills to one end,” *conspiratio plurium voluntatum ad eundem finem*.<sup>120</sup>

Thus, the power of the holder of sovereignty must extend, for Hobbes, far beyond the limits that the subjects of an Epicurean lawgiver would have given, as described by Hermarchus or Gassendi.<sup>121</sup> The theory of “authorization” in *Leviathan* is at the extreme end of such a tendency in Hobbes, and is his ultimate response to the merely utilitarian view of authority in Gassendi’s Neo-Epicureanism.

Though Gassendi tried to take into account many aspects newly brought to the fore by the revolutions and crises of European states—self-interest, aggression, the importance of juridical and political regulation—his Neo-Epicureanism, at least in Hobbes’s view, offered too mild and consensual a solution to the problem of authority, a solution unable to face the conflicts of the time. In turn, Hobbes’s solution must have seemed unbalanced and excessive to Gassendi, undervaluing the human instinct of cooperation and the utilitarian, not solely authoritarian and protective, function of the State. It is no accident that Locke, who read Gassendi, taught a more optimistic liberalism than Hobbes’s, in which the pursuit of happiness and the instinct for social life play a role similar to the one that they were given by Gassendi.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview: Moreau and Deneys-Tunney, *L'Épicurisme des Lumières*; Paganini and Tortarolo, *Der Garten und die Moderne*; Bloch, “L'héritage moderne de l'épicurisme antique”; Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity*; Leddy and Lifschitz, *Epicurus in the Enlightenment*.

<sup>2</sup> For Vico see Paganini, “Vico et Gassendi: de la prudence à la politique.”

<sup>3</sup> For a general picture see Rossi, *I segni del tempo*.

<sup>4</sup> Leibniz, *Nouveaux Essais sur l'Entendement Humain* IV, 443–44.

<sup>5</sup> Guyau, *La Morale d'Épicure et ses rapports avec les doctrines contemporaines*, 193–97, though he recognizes the importance of Gassendi, gives a summary treatment and commits the

anachronism of making Epicureanism a proto-Benthamite movement. Strauss, “Die Religionskritik des Hobbes,” 316–19 develops useful points on the impact of Epicureanism on Hobbes’s critique of religion, but fails to grasp its importance for his account of political philosophy, which relies on the confrontation with Aristotle. Cf. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*. Epicurus, Lucretius, and Gassendi are passed over in the study of Tuck, *Natural Right Theories*, which gives pride of place to the scholastics and Grotius. Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572–1651*, 31–64 gives a whole chapter to “Scepticism, Stoicism and *raison d’état*” but fails to consider the contribution of Epicureanism; he gives a few pages to the relations between Hobbes and Gassendi, but only deals with physics and epistemology (284–95). Gassendi is vividly present in Schuhmann’s studies, but there is only sporadic treatment of his political philosophy: Schuhmann, *Selected Papers on Renaissance Philosophy and on Thomas Hobbes*, 1–72, 171–260. The same may be said of scholars who have given great attention to classical and humanistic influences in Hobbes: Reik, *The Golden Lands of Thomas Hobbes*, 77–78 does not mention Epicurus and treats Gassendi mostly as an opponent of Descartes; Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* refers neither to Epicurus nor Gassendi; Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 38–65, 308–23. Epicureanism is totally unmentioned in the vast reconstruction of Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights*, which concentrates on the Aristotelian tradition and ends with a chapter on Grotius; so also the important study of Brett emphasizes the scholastic legacy, bringing out the line of descent from Thomism to Vasquez and ending with a chapter on Hobbes: Brett, *Liberty, Right and Nature*, 205–35. No allusion to Epicurean sources is found in two classic studies that bring out in their different ways the importance of selfish psychological motivations in Hobbes’s theory: von Leyden, *Hobbes and Locke*; McNeilly, *The Anatomy of Leviathan*. A good survey of Epicureanism’s role in Hobbes’s thought is Pacchi, “Hobbes e l’epicureismo,” which however does not include Gassendi.

<sup>6</sup> See Sarasohn, “Motion and Morality”; Bloch, “Gassendi et la théorie politique de Hobbes”; Sarasohn, *Gassendi’s Ethics*, 119–25; Ludwig, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Epikureischen Naturrechts*; Paganini, “Épicurisme et philosophie au XVIIe siècle,” “Hobbes, Gassendi et le *De cive*,” “Hobbes, Gassendi and the Tradition of Political Epicureanism,” “Hobbes, Gassendi und die Hypothese der Weltvernichtung,” and “Il piacere dell’amicizia.” More generally, Schuhmann, “Hobbes und Gassendi.” Sarasohn, “The Ethical and Political Philosophy of Pierre Gassendi” thought that the chronological priority was Gassendi’s, who therefore influenced Hobbes; but she erred in dating Gassendi’s texts, as Bloch showed, “Gassendi et la politique,” 68, 75. On Hobbes’s relation to Gassendi in matters of “first philosophy” and epistemology see Paganini, “Hobbes, Valla and the Trinity,” “Hobbes, Gassendi und die Hypothese der Weltvernichtung,” and “Le néant et le vide.”

<sup>7</sup> See Bloch, *La Philosophie de Gassendi*, “Gassendi et la politique”; Paganini, “Épicurisme et philosophie au XVIIe siècle” and “Hobbes, Gassendi e la psicologia del meccanicismo.” Sarasohn, *Gassendi’s Ethics*, 142–67 looks mostly at the posthumous text *Syntagma philosophicum* and neglects the *Animadversiones* and the commentary on *KD*, the principal source for Epicurean legal theory. General studies of Gassendi and the revival of Epicureanism: Gregory, *Scetticismo e empirismo*; and more recently Lennon, “The Epicurean New Way of Ideas: Gassendi, Locke, and Berkeley”; Bloch, “L’héritage libertin dans la pensée des Lumières”; Osler, *Divine Will and the Mechanical Philosophy*; Lolordo, *Pierre Gassendi and the Birth of Early Modern Philosophy*; Fisher, *Pierre Gassendi’s Philosophy and Science*; but these do not deal with ethics and politics.

<sup>8</sup> Comparisons of Hobbes and Epicureanism: Goldschmidt, *La doctrine d’Épicure et le droit*, 123, 245–47; more sceptical are Nichols, *Epicurean Political Philosophy*, 183–90; Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory*, 67, 77, 87. Gassendi is not mentioned in these but see Ludwig, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Epikureischen Naturrechts*, 401–30. This book argues for the elimination of the right to self-preservation from Hobbes’s mature work (*Leviathan*) except as a residuum of the “theistic” natural law theory of the earlier work: Ludwig, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Epikureischen Naturrechts*, 347–50. On the contrary, this right is found at the opening of *Leviathan* ch. 14. Ludwig

interprets Epicurean doctrine on right as utterly conventionalist, which is most controversial for classical Epicureanism and invalid for Gassendi, as I show here.

<sup>9</sup> Even in a classic study of contractarianism like Gough, *The Social Contract*, ch. 2, Epicurus is barely mentioned, and then only as a parallel to the sophistic theory he intended instead to challenge.

<sup>10</sup> See Miller, “Origins of Rights in Ancient Political Thought,” who however does not mention Epicureanism.

<sup>11</sup> *Dikaion* in Epicureanism is ambiguous between “right” (as a faculty) and “justice” (as a norm). Here we shall translate it mostly by “right,” or in some contexts as “justice.”

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Paganini, “Il piacere dell’amicizia.”

<sup>13</sup> For Gassendi, cf. Osler, “Baptizing Epicurean Atomism”; for Hobbes (and an interesting comparison with Epicureanism), Strauss, “Die Religionskritik des Hobbes,” 316–22 is still useful, though he sees the Epicurean theory (“die Epikureische Gesinnung”) in too general terms as “the natural interest of man” or “a desire to rid oneself of the fear of the divine.”

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bloch, “L’héritage libertin dans la pensée des Lumières,” xxvi–xxx; Paganini, “Hobbes, Gassendi e la psicologia del meccanicismo,” 354–57. The letter is Charles Cavendish to John Pell, October 10, 1644: “Mr. Hobbes writes Gassendes his philosophy is not yet printed but he hath reade it, and that it is big as Aristotle’s philosophie, but much truer and excellent Latin”: Halliwell, *A Collection of Letters*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> In *De sensu universe* (IV), *De sensibus speciatim* (VII), *De phantasia seu imaginatione* (VIII), *De intellectu* (IX), *De appetitu et affectibus animæ* (X).

<sup>16</sup> Paganini, “Hobbes, Gassendi e la psicologia del meccanicismo,” 414 correcting the dating of Pintard and Sarasohn.

<sup>17</sup> On Gassendi’s revisions of Epicureanism see Bloch, “L’héritage moderne de l’épicurisme antique,” 202–205, on the basis of the brief appendixes added to the more “thorny” chapters of the *Philosophiae Epicuri Syntagma*.

<sup>18</sup> *De motu, loco et tempore* XXX, §§3–26; Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 350–61. See the full introduction by Paganini to the recent Italian edition: Hobbes, *Moto, luogo e tempo*, 9–126. For Mersenne’s role, see the *Praefatio* in Mersenne, *Ballistica et Acontismologia*.

<sup>19</sup> *Samuelis Sorberii Praefatio, in qua de vita et moribus Petri Gassendi disseritur* in Gassendi, *Opera omnia* I (pages not numbered).

<sup>20</sup> Bloch, “Gassendi et la politique,” 75 thought Gassendi knew the *Elements*—written in English, and still in MS—but this is improbable.

<sup>21</sup> On Gassendi’s psychology, cf. Michael and Michael, “Gassendi on Sensation and Reflection,” “Corporeal Ideas in Seventeenth-century Psychology,” “Two Early Modern Concepts of Mind: Reflecting Substance vs. Thinking Substance,” and “The Theory of Ideas in Gassendi and Locke.”

<sup>22</sup> On Gassendi’s polemic against the scholastic theory of *species* cf. *Syntagma philosophicum* (hereafter *SP*) *Physica*, sectio III, Membrum II, lib. VI, “De sensu universe”, ch. 1 “De organis sensus”, in Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 3.337b–338a. Hobbes’s attack on *species* is a constant in all of his works. Cf. *Elements of law* (hereafter *El*). I, II, 4: 3–4; *Leviathan* I, 5; II, 9; XLVI, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.335–38 (*SP Physica*, sectio III, Membrum II, lib. VI, “De sensu universe”, ch. 1 “De organis sensus”).

<sup>24</sup> *SP*, *Physica* III, II, lib. VII, ch. V “De visu et visione,” Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.371–77. See also *SP Physica* III, II, lib. VI, ch. II “De sensuum percipiendi modo ac de sensibili,” Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.339.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *El*. I, I–4, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 1–17; *De motu, loco et tempore* XXX, 3–8, Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 349–52.

<sup>26</sup> *SP Physica* III, II, lib. VI, ch. I, Gassendi, *Opera omnia* 2.329a.

<sup>27</sup> *SP Physica* III, II, VI in Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.336a–b; *El.* I, II, 8, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 6; *De motu, loco et tempore* XXX, 3, Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 350.

<sup>28</sup> *El.* I, I, 6, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Gassendi, however, does not accept that the heart is the seat of sensation, as well as desire, as Hobbes does in *De motu* and *De corpore*: Paganini, “Hobbes, Gassendi e la psicologia del meccanicismo,” 370–72 (*SP Physica* III, II, VI, in Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.331b–336b). He, however, gives a faithful account of Epicurus’s views at *Philosophiae Epicuri Syntagma*, IX in Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 3.39b–41a.

<sup>30</sup> *El.* I, VII, 2, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 28; *SP Physica* I, VI, IV, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 1.384a–385b; *Epistolae quatuor de apparente magnitudine solis* (1640–41), Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 3.466b.

<sup>31</sup> *El.* I, III, 1, 3–4, Hobbes *The Elements of Law*, 8–10; *De motu, loco et tempore* XXX, 4, 7–8, Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 35,052; Gassendi: *SP Physica* III, II, X, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.476a.

<sup>32</sup> Thus giving an anatomical explanation of what in Hobbes is orderly vs. disorderly discourse: *De motu, loco et tempore* XXX, 8, Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 352.

<sup>33</sup> *SP Physica* III, II, ii (Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.403a, 405a). For the “succession of conceptions in the mind, their series or consequences of one after another,” which is the “discourse of the mind,” *El.* I, IV, 1–6 (Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 13–15); *De motu, loco et tempore* XXX, 8–10 (Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 351–53).

<sup>34</sup> *SP Physica* III, II, V, iii, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 1.315a, but this chapter was first published in the *Animadversiones* of 1649: Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 1.354–64.

<sup>35</sup> *SP Physica* III, II, X, i, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.474a.

<sup>36</sup> Cic. *Fin.* 3.35.

<sup>37</sup> *Philosophiae Epicuri Syntagma*, XIX, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 3.48b.

<sup>38</sup> *Philosophiae Epicuri Syntagma*, XIX, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 3.48b; Lucr. *DRN* 3.136–417.

<sup>39</sup> *SP Physica* III, II, X, i, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.471b.

<sup>40</sup> *SP Physica* III, II, X, i, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 4.488b.

<sup>41</sup> *SP Physica*, III, II, X, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.474b.

<sup>42</sup> *El.* I, VII, 1, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 28: “Every motion propagated as far as the heart by the action of objects either aids or impedes the vital motion.”

<sup>43</sup> *De motu, loco et tempore* XXX, 23, Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 359. In the *Elements* the movement that helps or favours vital movement is called “DELIGHT, contentment, or pleasure,” but “is nothing really but motion about the heart” (*El.* I, VII, 1, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 28).

<sup>44</sup> *De motu, loco et tempore* XXX, 3; XXXVIII, 12, Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 349, 421.

<sup>45</sup> In the *Syntagma*, by leaving a place for an immaterial *intellectus*, this helps establish Gassendi’s epistemology and bolster free will, in opposition to what he calls a “democritean” strong determinism—which Sarasohn, *Gassendi’s Ethics*, 128–30 sees rightly as a polemical depiction of Hobbes’s stance; she also sees that Gassendi’s view of *appetitus* is itself wholly materialist.

<sup>46</sup> *SP Physica* X, III, II, ii: Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.480a.

<sup>47</sup> *SP Physica* X, III, II, ii: Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 1.474a, and the whole chapter, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.469–74.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. McNeilly, *The Anatomy of Leviathan*; Lott, “The Psychology of Self-preservation in Hobbes.”

<sup>49</sup> Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory*, 67.

<sup>50</sup> *El. I, VII, 7*, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 30: “FELICITY, therefore (by which we mean continual delight), consisteth not in having prospered, but in prospering.”

<sup>51</sup> Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory*, 87.

<sup>52</sup> Paganini, “Hobbes, Gassendi e la psicologia del meccanicismo,” 400-31; Sarasohn, *Gassendi’s Ethics*, 51–75.

<sup>53</sup> Pacchi, *Scritti hobbesiani (1987–1990)*, 79–95: from *Elements* to *Leviathan* the reference to power remains, but no longer precedes the treatment of the passions, which therefore gains greater autonomy and amplitude. *De motu, loco et tempore* represents an intermediate stage in this development.

<sup>54</sup> *El. I, IX, §21*, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 47.

<sup>55</sup> *De motu, loco et tempore XXXVIII, 5*, Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 415: “itaque manet verum rationem boni, ideoque foelicitatis, consistere in appetitione.”

<sup>56</sup> *De motu, loco et tempore XXXVIII, 8*, Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 418.

<sup>57</sup> *De motu, loco et tempore XXXVIII*, Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 416; cf. *Leviathan XI*.

<sup>58</sup> *SP Ethica I, I*, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.664b and *SP Ethica I, V*, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.717a–718a.

<sup>59</sup> *El. I, VII, §3*, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 29; *SP Physica III, II, X, iii* Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.481b; cf. Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.488a–b, 487b.

<sup>60</sup> *El. I, vii, 2*, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 28; *Praefatio in Mersenni Ballisticam (Thomæ Hobbes Malmesburiensis Opera Latina 5.317)*; *De motu, loco et tempore XXX, 23*, Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 359; *XXXVII, 4*, *Critique du De mundo*, 404.

<sup>61</sup> *SP Physica III, II, X, iii*, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.482b–483a.

<sup>62</sup> Epicurus’s emphasis on personal contentment as opposed to self-preservation (Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory*, 68 n.) would be wrong for Gassendi. Sarasohn, *Gassendi’s Ethics*, 134 argues that for Gassendi “self-preservation” is opposed to “pleasure,” but the commentary of Gassendi on *KD* (which she doesn’t discuss) makes self-preservation central to Neo-Epicureanism.

<sup>63</sup> *El. I, xiv, 6*, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 71; *De motu, loco et tempore XXX, 24*, Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 360.

<sup>64</sup> *El. I, xvii, 14*, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 93–94; *De motu, loco et tempore XXX, 23*, Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo*, 359.

<sup>65</sup> *El. I, xvii, 14*, Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 94.

<sup>66</sup> *De cive, Libertas, I, 7*, Hobbes, *De cive*, 94.

<sup>67</sup> *De cive Libertas I, 8*, Hobbes, *De cive*, 94: « *Neque enim iuris nomine aliud significatur, quam libertas quam quisque habet facultatibus naturalibus secundem rectam rationem utendi* » ; English version, Hobbes, *De cive*, 47.

<sup>68</sup> *SP Physica III, II, X, ii*, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.486b.

<sup>69</sup> *SP Ethica I, iii*, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.695a.

<sup>70</sup> *SP Ethica I, iv*, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.709a–710b.

<sup>71</sup> *De cive Libertas I, x*, Hobbes, *De cive*, 95. The similarity to *KD 31*, as translated by Gassendi is obvious (see below note 77).

<sup>72</sup> *SP Ethica II, v*, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.794b–795b.

<sup>73</sup> At this point Gassendi goes even beyond Hobbes, who had assumed as a norm of equity the Gospel precept (Mt. 22:36, 40) “love thy neighbor as thyself.” Cf. *De cive Libertas IV, xii*, Hobbes, *De cive*, 126.

<sup>74</sup> *SP Ethica II, v*, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.799a–801b.

<sup>75</sup> Most contemporary writers base their account on *SP*, without looking at *Animadversiones*.



<sup>76</sup> Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.299b. In italic the additions made by Gassendi.

<sup>77</sup> Philippson, “Studien zu Epikur and den Epikureern,” 29; Müller, “Sur le concept de Physis dans la philosophie épicurienne du droit,” 305 and *Die Epikureische Gesellschaftstheorie*, 92–93. See also Goldschmidt, *La doctrine d’Épicure et le droit*, 25, 40, 79, 141, 160–62, 171, 239–44, and among more recent studies Long, “Pleasure and Social Utility”; Alberti, “The Epicurean Theory of Law and Justice.”

<sup>78</sup> Gassendi classes *Ἐνεκα τοῦ θαρρεῖν ἐξ ἀνθρώπων* = *securitatem ex hominibus adipisci* (*KD* 6) and *asphaleia* (*KD* 7), *status securus*, as essentials for the enjoyment of the “good of nature.” *Animadversiones* II, p. 279a. On the politics of self-preservation, and defense against aggression without which “we would all devour each other” he adds Plut. *Adv. Col.* 30, 1124 d. Cf. *SP*, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.755b.

<sup>79</sup> Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.304a–b. Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.300b.

<sup>80</sup> Goldschmidt, *La doctrine d’Épicure et le droit*, 141. *Philosophiæ Epicuri Syntagma*, III, XXV “De Iure, seu Iusto, a quo Iustitia dicta” (Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 3.87a–b) makes this point quite clear.

<sup>81</sup> Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.300b.

<sup>82</sup> Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.299b: “if the phrase had allowed it” he writes, “I would have translated ‘the rule of utility’ as ‘the contract established with a view to utility.’” All that held him back was probably a philological scruple—unlike, we might add, many a modern scholar, like Gigon, Boyancé, Guyau, Ernout, and Diano, who in their translations all chose that way.

<sup>83</sup> On this basis Goldschmidt, *La doctrine d’Épicure et le droit*, 123 compares Hobbes to Epicurus.

<sup>84</sup> Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.299b–300b.

<sup>85</sup> Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.300b.

<sup>86</sup> In his translation of *KD* 33: Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.302a.

<sup>87</sup> Grotius, “Prolegomena,” §5 and 16, Grotius, *De iure belli ac pacis libri tres*, iv, xi.

<sup>88</sup> La Mothe Le Vayer, *Quatre Dialogues faits à l’imitation des anciens par Orasius Tubero*, 42.

<sup>89</sup> Commentary on *KD* 31, Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.300a.

<sup>90</sup> *SP* *Ethica* II, v, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.796b–797b.

<sup>91</sup> *SP* *Ethica* II, v, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.803a–805b.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Villey, *Les Leçons d’histoire de la philosophie du droit*, 246–49.

<sup>93</sup> Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.303a.

<sup>94</sup> Brown, “Politics and Society,” 195.

<sup>95</sup> Morel, “Les communautés humaines,” 180.

<sup>96</sup> Müller. “Sur le concept de Physis dans la philosophie épicurienne du droit,” 311.

<sup>97</sup> *SP* *Ethica*, II, v, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.800b–802a. Cf. on *KD* 33 and 34, Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.303a, 303b. On *lex naturalis*, Gassendi’s views are very unlike those of the contemporary Jesuits, *pace* Borkenau, *Der Uebergang vom feudalen zum bürgerlichen Weltbild*, ch. 6; cf. Paganini, “Épicurisme et philosophie au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle.” On the *lex naturæ* in Gassendi, cf. Tamagnini, *Filosofia del diritto come teoria dell’utile*, 120–25.

<sup>98</sup> *SP* *Ethica* II, v, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.795a.

<sup>99</sup> *SP* *Ethica* I, iii, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.701. Cf. Sarasohn, *Gassendi’s Ethics*, 63–64.

<sup>100</sup> Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.302.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Paganini, “Il piacere dell’amicizia.”

<sup>102</sup> *Men.* 132; *Fin.* 1.42–54.

<sup>103</sup> Lactantius, *Divin. Instit.* 3.17, 42 (Usener 523). Epictetus attributed a radical negation to Epicurus: “there exists no community of nature” (Arr. *Epict.* 1.23.1 = Usener fr. 525). And yet he also attributed to Epicurus the statement that men are naturally communal. For both statements cf. *SP* (*Opera omnia*) 2.753b–754a. Cf. Salem, *Tel un Dieu parmi les hommes*, 165.

<sup>104</sup> I have written elsewhere other studies of aspects of the relationship Gassendi-Hobbes via Epicurus, on the state of nature, the artificiality of norms, and the role of *synthēkai* vis à vis sovereign authority: Paganini, “Hobbes, Gassendi et le ‘*De cive*’” and “Hobbes, Gassendi and the Tradition of Political Epicureanism.”

<sup>105</sup> The formula “men are said to be sociable by nature” appears also in *El.* I, ix, 16 in Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 43, referring however to private affections, such as love and friendship.

<sup>106</sup> *De cive* “*Libertas*” I, 2 in Hobbes, *De cive*, 90; English version Hobbes, *De cive*, 42, which concludes: “We must therefore resolve, that the Originall of all great, and lasting Societies, consisted not in the mutuall good will men had towards each other, but in the mutual fear they had of each other [*non a mutua hominum beneuolentia, sed a mutuo metu*].”

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Ludwig, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Epikureischen Naturrechts*, 304, 421.

<sup>108</sup> *SP* *Ethica* II, v in Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2. 795b: *quippe nihil aliud sunt leges, quam pacta*.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Paganini, “Hobbes, Gassendi and the Tradition of Political Epicureanism”; Bloch, “Gassendi et la théorie politique de Hobbes,” 343 noted a reference of Gassendi’s (*ut non multo ante observatum est*, in *SP* *Ethica*, II, ii in Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.755a) that is almost certainly to Hobbes’s description of the state of nature in the first edition of *De cive*.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Paganini, “Hobbes, Gassendi et le ‘*De cive*.’”

<sup>111</sup> *SP* *Ethica* II, v in Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.794–95.

<sup>112</sup> *SP* *Ethica* II, v in Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.795b.

<sup>113</sup> *SP* *Ethica* II, v in Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.795a.

<sup>114</sup> Gassendi, *Animadversiones*, 2.302a (on Porph. *Abst.* 1.7.1).

<sup>115</sup> Gassendi gives the whole passage of Hermarchus in Greek and Latin at *SP* *Ethica* II, v, Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 1.791–94.

<sup>116</sup> Hobbes, *De cive*, 6–8 of 1647 edition.

<sup>117</sup> *De cive* *Libertas* I 2 in Hobbes, *De cive*, Lat., 92; Engl. 44: *Verum quidem esse homini per naturam, sive quatenus est homo, id est, statim atque est natus solitudinem perpetuam molestam esse* [. . .] *Itaque homines alterum alterius congressum natura cogente appetere non nego*.

<sup>118</sup> *De cive* *Libertas* I, ii in Hobbes, *De cive*, Engl. 44–5: “although Man were born in such a condition as to desire it, it followes not, that he therefore were born fit to enter into it; for it is one thing to desire, another to be in capacity fit for what we desire; for even they, who through their pride, will not stoop to equall conditions, without which there can be no Society, do yet desire it”; Lat. 92: *Porro tametsi ea conditione natus esset homo ut societatem appeteret, non sequitur eundem ita natum esse ut societati ineundae sit idoneus. Alia res est appetere, alia capacem esse. Appetunt enim illi qui tamen conditiones aequas, sine quibus societas esse non potest, accipere per superbiam non dignantur. Appetere is also the verb in Gassendi: [homo] pars quaedam est, esseve appetit societatis” (*SP* *Ethica* II, v in Gassendi, *Opera omnia*, 2.794a).*

<sup>119</sup> *De cive*, *Libertas* I, ii in Hobbes, *De cive*, Engl., 44: “But though the benefits [*commoda*] of this life may be much farthered by mutuall help, since yet those may be better attain’d to by Dominion, then by the society of others: I hope no body will doubt but that man would much more greedily be carryed by Nature [*natura sua*], if all fear [*metus*] were removed, to obtain Dominion, then to gaine Society [*ad dominationem quam ad societatem*]. We must therefore resolve, that the Originall of all great, and lasting Societies, consisted not in the mutuall good will men had towards each other [*non a mutua hominum beneuolentia*], but in the mutuall fear [*a mutuo metu*] they had of each other.” The



formulation in *De cive*, I, ii, Lat., 92 is striking: *Quamquam autem commoda huius vitae augeri mutua ope possunt, cum autem id fieri multo magis Dominio possit, quam societate aliorum, nemini dubium esse debet quin avidius ferrentur homines natura sua, si metus abesset, ad dominationem quam ad societatem.*

<sup>120</sup> Cf. *De cive*, V, v–vi, 133: *Consensio itaque, siue societas contracta, sine potestate aliqua communi, per quam metu poenae singuli regantur, non sufficit ad securitatem quae requiritur ad exercitium iustitiae naturalis . . . Quoniam igitur conspiratio plurium voluntatum ad eundem finem non sufficit ad conseruationem pacis, & defensionem stabilem, requiritur ut circa ea quae ad pacem & defensionem sunt necessaria, una omnium sit voluntas. Hoc autem fieri non potest, nisi unusquisque voluntatem suam, alterius unius, nimirum unius Hominis, vel unius Concilij, voluntati, ita subiiciat, ut pro voluntate omnium & singulorum, habendum sit, quicquid de iis rebus quae necessariae sunt ad pacem communem, ille voluerit.*

<sup>121</sup> On other aspects of Hobbes’s relation to the humanistic-Epicurean tradition—especially Valla—cf. Paganini, “Thomas Hobbes e Lorenzo Valla” and “Hobbes, Valla and the Trinity”; on Epicurean religion, Springborg, “Hobbes and Epicurean Religion.”

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Sarasohn, *Gassendi’s Ethics*, 168–97.

## CHAPTER 27

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# EPICURUS IN EIGHTEENTH- AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH THOUGHT

*A “Freedom of Pleasures”?*

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THOMAS M. KAVANAGH

THE expression “freedom of pleasures” is somewhat jarring. In the original French, *la liberté des plaisirs* is quite rare. The database of the *Trésor de la Langue Française* offers only a single example. It dates back to 1586 and is drawn from the *Memoirs of Marguerite de Valois*, that is to say of Marguerite of France, better known—thanks to Alexandre Dumas—as “La Reine Margot” who would become the spouse of Henri IV. The expression occurs as the young Marguerite recalls a day when she happened to overhear an exchange between her mother, Catherine de Médicis and her *dame de compagnie*, madame de Dampierre. The mother, suddenly realizing that her daughter is listening to her exchange, turns toward her daughter and abruptly declares: “You have been born in terrible times,” offering as proof of that claim the reign of constant rumors that now besiege all the members of the court of her husband, King Henri II. Looking back to

the very different and happier times of her own youth, Catherine de Médicis—Marguerite tells us—“launched into a description for madame de Dampierre of the very genuine *liberté des plaisirs* that prevailed because people like themselves were not subjects of constant scandalmongering.”<sup>1</sup>

More than two centuries later, on March 18, 1800, the expression appears again—this time not in the intimate recollections of a personal memoir, but in an official government document. The Paris *Préfet de police*, a certain Dubois recently named to his post by First Consul Bonaparte, publicly announced that, as concerned the policing of the capital, a new age had dawned: “All those practices that once provoked your complaints will be my first concern.” Speaking as someone who appreciates nuance and necessary distinctions, he continues:

In our jails and prisons, I will separate the accused from the guilty, the trouble maker from the careless, and the vagabond from the unfortunate.

The *Préfet*’s real goal, however, was to proclaim liberty—in all its forms—as the most eloquent proof of the new relation between government and the governed:

This freedom of religion, freedom of thought, and freedom of pleasures [*liberté des plaisirs*] will demonstrate to everyone that the government’s only intention is to treat you as free men.<sup>2</sup>

What the *Préfet* means when he invokes freedom of religion and freedom of thought is readily understood. All religions and all individual opinions will be respected. His third freedom, however, that of pleasures, remains startlingly opaque.

The term pleasure itself was hardly innocent. Throughout the Enlightenment pleasure had been a central theme of philosophical reflection within that century’s Epicurean tradition. Its major figures, novelists and artists, *philosophes* as well as *libertins*, set out to describe, analyze, and multiply the resolutely subjective experience of pleasure. Pleasure was the elixir to be found not only in a glass, but in an intimate encounter, a novel, an opera, or a painting. During the three-quarters of a century between 1715 and the early 1790s pleasure was consecrated as a force driving individual action and constituting the essence of existence. The ability to take pleasure and to multiply pleasure as a gift shared with one’s companion, reader, or

public became a signature of the century's conviviality. Pleasure was the shared endeavor of individuals savoring what their senses perceived as well as of a larger community knitted together by the expression and communication of its pleasures. The optimism of the French Enlightenment flowed from its faith in pleasure as a universal currency whose endless exchange could bind together all sentient beings.<sup>3</sup>

Both as an experience of the senses and as the foundation of a new social contract, Enlightenment pleasure emerged from the minatory shadow of Christian asceticism. The trauma of France's wars of religion, resurrected by Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and in the religious cleansing that would continue until the Revolution, led an ever-growing number to see the conflict between Catholic and Protestant as proof of their shared absurdity. The scandal of a Christianity at war with itself established agnosticism and atheism as intellectually responsible options for those who rejected religion's twinned intolerances. At the same time, the body's senses, relegated by both religious camps to the realm of the dangerous and the sinful, became the touchstone of a new empiricism that looked to the data of the senses as the bedrock of all knowledge. By mid-century, the *philosophes*, reversing the Cartesian primacy of mind, insisted that sensation not only preceded thought, but that only the data of the senses could be truly clear and distinct. This Enlightenment Epicureanism was defined by a dynamic tension between pleasure as idiolect and pleasure as lingua franca. To invoke pleasure was to speak of sensations in the key of the individual, of experience as something always personal. Yet representing that pleasure, making it real for others, involved not so much an objectification of those sensations, but their pan-subjectification—an enticing seduction of all who make up one's audience. The sometimes naïve optimism of the French Enlightenment sought to parlay the always individual pleasure of the one into the exuberance of the many.

It is against this background that we can best understand how puzzling the *Préfet's* reference to a freedom of pleasure must have seemed. In the Enlightenment's reflections on that subject the accent was on questions of what might be pleasure's intensity and duration. Anchored within the sentient person, within individual subjectivity, pleasure either was—or it was not. Because it occurred as an epiphany of the bodily senses, pleasure invoked the world outside the self as an invitation extended to others to join

in that experience. At no point, however, was pleasure's sparking of the senses and the imagination conceived of as dependent upon approval by some outside authority. Far more frequently, pleasure was an outlaw neither soliciting nor depending on any authorization beyond the sentient self.

The strangeness of this expression provoked a number of contentious responses. Scarcely three months after the *Préfet's* proclamation, the liberal Swiss anti-Bonapartist, Francis d'Ivernois, writing from London, offered what was perhaps the most facetious gloss on the expression: "This freedom of pleasures, perhaps intended to compensate Parisians for the muzzling of the press, meant allowing the re-opening of what were called temples of folly (*les temples de la folie*), and this certainly brought just as much joy to the inhabitants of the city as did the re-opening of the Churches to the inhabitants of the countryside."<sup>4</sup> D'Ivernois even goes so far as to imagine in these temples of folly an almost Sadian spirit of universal and obligatory sexual availability: "saturnalias where proper conduct allows victims neither ill humor nor violence against their persecutors." This mocking vision of a France appeased in its capital by sexual license and in its villages by the reopening of churches was quickly contested by Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac who capped his much tamer version of what went on with a sharp swipe at reactionary imaginations:

D'Ivernois is even offended by our masked balls, referring to them as *temples de la folie* and there is no doubt that, like his irenic masters, he much prefers the calamities of civil war.<sup>5</sup>

This controversy around what the expression "freedom of pleasures" might mean is understandable. These two interpretations from the first years of the nineteenth century underline how thoroughly the tumults of Revolution, Terror, and Consulat had inflected the ways one might imagine the relation between pleasure and politics, be those politics personal or public. If the eighteenth century's Epicurean materialism could so easily invoke pleasure as the goal and driving force of its many utopias, it was because that concept was too easily conflated with what religion condemned as sinful. The fact that, in the post-Revolutionary context, the expression "freedom of pleasures" could be interpreted as suggesting anything from a masked ball to generalized prostitution says much about how fraught had become the invocation of the Epicurean's key concept.

The three meanings for the word “Epicure” offered by the current edition of the Oxford English Dictionary stand almost as a mini-lesson in social history. The first meaning, the word with a capital E, designates “a disciple of Epicurus, one who disbelieves in the divine government of the world.” The second meaning, eliding philosophical reference in favor of moral judgment, is “one who gives himself up to sensual pleasure, to eating; a glutton, a sybarite.” The third, contemporary meaning tempers the stricture attached to the term and speaks instead of “one who cultivates a refined taste for the pleasures of the table; one who is choice and dainty in eating and drinking.”<sup>6</sup> Over the last few years, however, a new appreciation of the Epicure’s grounding in a long but broken classical tradition has emerged. Stephen Greenblatt’s Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning *The Swerve*<sup>7</sup> of 2011 purports to tell us the story of nothing less than “how the world became modern.” As Greenblatt sees it, the answer to that question has everything to do with the fortunes of the didactic poem written by Epicurus’s most devoted and most eloquent disciple. As concerns the French Enlightenment, that poem, Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, *On the Nature of Things*, uncannily anticipates, even in its brief title, the two concepts that would become the twin motors of Enlightenment philosophy. “Nature”—the code word for a new attention to a reality set free from the strictures of metaphysical principles—challenged humankind to understand the world not as a creation but as a given. At the same time, the all-encompassing sweep of the term “things”—*rerum*—proposes that world as a continuum challenging all artificial boundaries between the physical and the spiritual, between the material and the human. To concern oneself with “the nature of things” was already to embrace the principal tenets of the Enlightenment’s subversive agenda.

If Greenblatt’s underlining of modernity’s debt to Lucretius strikes us as both novel and overdue, this has to do with the fact, as we saw in the *OED*, the term “Epicurean” broadened its reference at the price of being stripped of its philosophical underpinnings. The term “Epicurean” comes readily to our lips, while the term “Lucretian”—at least for non-classicists—seems scholarly and obscure. The fact is, however, that when the eighteenth century spoke of “the Epicurean” its implicit point of reference was Lucretius’s often translated poem. If the Epicurean had far greater currency than the Lucretian, it was because the Epicurean had long been linked with a Stoicism understood as its enemy twin. Throughout the early modern

period, and especially for the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, the opposition of the Epicurean to the Stoic provided a shorthand for the two major variants of a newly secular humanism. The Epicurean evoked an anti-metaphysical individualism centered on a practice of life that sought to maximize pleasure and minimize suffering. The Stoic reconfigured the same materialist principles in the service of a new sociability anchored in a demanding practice of classical virtue. In his entry on Epicureanism in the *Encyclopédie*, Denis Diderot made it clear, even as he tempered the Church's systematic vilification of Epicurus as an apostle of bestial self-indulgence, that his importance lay finally in his preparing the way for the higher ideal of Stoicism—"We are born Epicureans," Diderot put it, "but we become Stoics."<sup>8</sup>

Less than three decades after Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, the Revolution and the Republic defined themselves as the antithesis of a monarchy and an aristocracy denounced not only as Epicureans but for having appropriated only to themselves all the pleasures of life. The Epicurean care of the self and cultivation of pleasure became the designated enemy of the new order. Embracing the muscular Stoicism of a republican virtue that was both proscriptive and punitive, the Revolution denounced Enlightenment Epicureanism as an abuse so nefarious that it could be imagined only as that that must no longer be—as the "*ancien régime*." The Republican embrace of Stoic virtue not only rejected any continuity with practices redolent of Epicureanism, but proposed a new deontology of nature: a new understanding of that foundational concept in whose name the Republic purported to act and to govern. Scholars such as Dan Edelstein in his *The Terror of Natural Right*<sup>9</sup> and Mary Ashburn Miller in her *Natural History of Revolution*<sup>10</sup> have shown how the term "nature"—once the benevolent cornerstone of the Epicurean argument that life's pleasures must be embraced without fear of punishment by imaginary gods—took on a very different connotation within the turmoil of the Revolution. The terrifying destruction wrought by such natural phenomena as calcifying lightning and fulminating volcanoes—forces unmasked by Lucretius as the favored tools of fear-mongering priests—became, as Miller puts it, "sacralized" during the Terror as emblems of the necessity that an entirely natural and regenerative popular violence be unleashed against all who would impede the General Will as the expression of Republican Virtue.



How, given the Revolution's self-definition as the obliteration of an aristocracy defined by its exclusive franchise on pleasure, could the Epicurean vision of society as an economy of pleasures exchanged and multiplied ever again achieve any cultural purchase? It was, I will argue, around what could be termed a new politics of the table that the Epicurean foregrounding of the sentient and pleased body came to resurface. The harbingers of this new politics can be read in the history of two words: gourmand and gastronomy. "*Gourmand*," along with its derivative of "*gourmandise*," lost their earlier negative connotations aligning them with the indiscriminate over-indulgence of the glutton. In a number of early nineteenth-century works, the term "gourmand" came instead to designate a person concerned with the refinement and intensity of the pleasures to be experienced within the rituals of the table. Parallel to this newly positive sense of gourmand there emerged during the same period a neologism designating a quasi-scientific concern with the protocols of food preparation and service: "gastronomy" understood as a body of knowledge governing the care and delight of the stomach.

I highlight these two terms because they are part of an important mutation that allowed the Epicurean tradition of the eighteenth century to re-emerge in a distinctly different form and with a distinctly different politics. Prior to the Revolution, Enlightenment Epicureanism took its most aggressive form in the ideology of libertinage. That practice of pleasure posited sexuality as the royal road to a true understanding of nature and its ultimately philosophical challenge to religion's repressive condemnation of the flesh. Works as different as d'Argens's *Thérèse philosophe*, Diderot's *Supplement to Bougainville*, and Laclos's *Dangerous Liaisons* proposed for an enlightened elite a practice in private of sexual pleasures at the antipodes of Christian asceticism. After the Revolution, the gourmand and the new science of gastronomy shifted the Epicurean focus away from private sexual pleasure and toward the publicly shared delights of taste and table. In so doing, they reconfigured an Epicureanism still rooted in sensual materialism, but whose praxis of pleasure displaced the libertine's emphasis on the sweet voice of our sexual natures toward an appreciation of the table not only as a locus of pleasuring objects but as the inauguration of a new form of sociability. The table as a confluence of gustatory delights extended the practice of pleasure beyond the closed circle of sexual initiates to a larger community defined by its appreciation of the gourmand's new

science of gastronomy. Gastronomy was posited as a connoisseurship so potent in its seductions that it promised to multiply and extend an ever-growing community of the *cognoscenti*.

A fascinating example of how a transmuted post-Revolutionary Epicureanism would emerge around a new politics of the table can be found in the one-act play, *L'École des Gourmands* by René Chazet. A comedy in fourteen scenes first staged in August of 1804, *The School for Refined Eaters*, as one might translate the title, appeared ten years after the height of the Terror, four years after Bonaparte's coup of 18 Brumaire, and just a few months before the First Counsel would proclaim himself Emperor. As the title indicates, this comedy is very much in the French neoclassical tradition. Harking back to Molière's *L'École des femmes* of 1662, it stages the story of an older man, Gourmandin, who is set on marrying his young ward, Élise. She, of course, is also being courted by a much younger suitor named Dorval. Although Gourmandin is not aware of it, Dorval is in fact his nephew, the son of his long-absent sister, Caramel, who lives in the provinces. The dynamics of the traditional love triangle pitting age against youth is complicated by the fact that, as his name indicates, Gourmandin's greatest passion is for the delicious dishes that Dorval, disguised as his *maître d'hôtel* and cook, has delighted him with ever since he entered his household. As the play opens, Gourmandin is savoring the prospect of the moment that should provide the perfect synthesis of his two passions: the wedding feast Dorval will prepare for his marriage to Élise. Gourmandin's high hopes for this meal lead him to insist that Dorval achieve within it new and more delicious heights of culinary accomplishment. While certainly good, Gourmandin insists, Dorval has begun to let his work become routine while, like all true artists, Dorval should instead strive "*pour la gloire*": "All your plates are carefully prepared and wholesome, but you are not inventing anything."<sup>11</sup> Never suspecting the irony of his metaphors, Gourmandin insists that Dorval should approach the upcoming wedding dinner as his chance to become a true creator (10):

Think, my friend, of your honor. Forget the standard fare and distinguish yourself with dishes that astound. Become the father of some truly new delight and you will be my cook forever.

This light comedy is particularly interesting for the way it draws into its intrigue quadrants of the material and economic world that extend well

beyond the ironies of obsession and self-deception that define the standard Molièresque monomaniacs of *The Miser* or *The Imaginary Invalid*. Gourmandin's passion for all the finest delicacies opens the play to forces beyond the individual mania of the lovers' triangle. The link to that larger world is the character Piquassiette (Meal-Beggar). True to his name, Piquassiette can be counted on to arrive at just the right moment to insure his being invited to a meal. As the play opens, this shady character is trying to enlist Dorval in his scheme to swindle the wealthy Gourmandin. Knowing exactly how to bait his hook, he plans to invite Gourmandin to become the principal investor in an enterprise that, for a mere twenty thousand francs, will make him the owner of Paris's most refined food emporium. Anticipating today's Fauchon or Hédiard, that enterprise will be "a treasure house of the rarest and most curious foodstuffs" (12). With the rigors of the Terror and famine forgotten, Piquassiette presents himself as a savvy marketer who understands that, in the new world of the Empire, captivating the always hungry eye is what sells product. The entire shop will be a locus of pure display (12):

All the walls will be transparent, and, through panes of Bavarian glass, our customers will discover, arranged with perfect taste and symmetry, everything that can kindle the desires of even the most blasé for the delicacies we offer.

In the tradition of Molière's devious schemers, Piquassiette's take-over of Gourmandin's life is ultimately comic. When he insists that Gourmandin hire a master-of-arms named Plastron as his exercise coach, the idea is that strenuous training with saber and sword will solve Gourmandin's problem of an expanding waist line. He does not, of course, mention that such workouts will also have the collateral benefit of insuring that Gourmandin be ravenously hungry for Piquassiette's well-timed arrivals. Comically staging the trope of the trickster tricked, Chazet transforms the master-of-arm's critique of Gourmandin's fencing performance into a not so *sotto voce* commentary on Piquassiette's investment scheme. When Piquassiette mentions that many other investors would love to get in on the deal he is proposing, Plastron cautions "It's a feint; don't be drawn forward!" (11). Gourmandin's demurral that he is short of ready cash provokes Plastron's "Well done!". When Piquassiette insists that culinary delicacies would be the perfect sector for Gourmandin's investment, Plastron critiques his footwork with "You're leaving yourself open . . . . Back off, back off" (11).

As the play moves forward, the nexus of fine eating and hard cash produces a veritable bidding war for Dorval's services as a cook. When Gourmandin's sister, Caramel, arrives in Paris to convince her brother that the marriage to his young ward would be ridiculous, she not only goes along with her son's masquerade but quickly hits on a strategy that will attack Gourmandin where he is most vulnerable. At the very moment Gourmandin fantasizes about the superb meal Dorval will prepare for the wedding, she delivers her *coup de théâtre*: "It's too late for all that, brother dear, Monsieur now works for me" (23). Stunned at this unexpected turn of events, Gourmandin first tries to warn Dorval as to what he risks should he enter the service of someone whose tastes are as pedestrian as the hyper-sweet-toothed Caramel: "You have no idea of what you're getting yourself into! You'll be a man forever lost to your sacred arts. One month of working for her and your skills will be gone forever. A lean stew or some pedestrian pot roast will be the limit of your work, and in no time you will have lost all the talents that make a truly great chef" (23). When Caramel replies that she has already hired Dorval with wages of five hundred francs, the bidding war is on. When the rising numbers reach a thousand francs, Dorval spurs Gourmandin on with a full inventory of his talents. "A thousand francs, going once, going twice, do I hear more? I'm a master of the rolling pin as well as the roasting spit; and I can glaze fruits as well as I roast a capon" (24). As Gourmandin's bid reaches fourteen hundred francs, Caramel closes him out with "Let's get this over with. I'll add two hundred francs to whatever price my brother puts on your talents. So just come along" (25). This comic bidding war adds an unwelcome irony to Gourmandin's earlier optimistic observation that (18):

A well-furnished table makes money circulate, brings the people you need to your home, and knits new bonds of friendship—that is a proven fact.

*L'École des gourmands* finally resolves its conflicts not with a lost cook or swindled suitor but within a comic reflection on what Gourmandin's marriage will mean for the pleasures of his table. "What, my dear sir, just think about it," warns Dorval (25):

A gourmand who marries is taking a wife who will annoy you about everything: her frying the fish when you want it poached; her putting the pigeons in a mixed stew when you want them roasted.

Gourmandin may think he can handle a new bride, but he has no answer for a graver danger: “Your better half in everything, she will also be eating half the dinner” (25). That sobering thought leads Gourmandin to see his marriage from a new perspective (26):

I have to admit, not marrying might be the best course; life should be a great feast and marriage is only an hors-d’oeuvre.

The play’s final scene is a *vaudeville*, a ditty made up of aphorisms sung by each character to the music of a popular air titled “The Dance of the Petits Pâtés.” Recalling the *finale* of Beaumarchais’s *Marriage of Figaro* where a collective hymn of reconciliation proclaims the equality of all before the sweet and the bitter of life, Chazet readjusts that message to the metaphors of the happy eater (26–27):

Rich and poor, wise men and fools, we all share the same tastes. And all here below are guests at a great feast. Life’s banquet serves us love, gaiety, and folly each in their turn. But soon they are gone and we regret their loss. Then it is that friendship comes, and serves a delightful dessert.

How are we to understand this play’s affirmation of friendship around a well-furnished table as a pleasure preferable to sexuality? The traditional *moraliste* might hear in Chazet’s closing scene a resignation to aging and its attendant calming of the passions. Throughout the play, however, the connotations associated with the table of friendship turn less on any passage through time than they do on the period’s larger society and its history. We saw how Gourmandin’s optimism summarizes itself in the three functions he attributes to his “well-furnished table”: an economic function (“makes money circulate”); a political function (“brings the people you need to your home”); and a fraternal function (“knits new bonds of friendship”). As though anticipating the huge political banquets that would play so important a role later in the nineteenth century, this configuration linking the pleasures of the table with a resolution of conflicts and reaffirmation of social bonds takes on a resonance establishing it as much more than a comic alternative to amorous rivalry.

The word “gastronomy,” the other early nineteenth-century neologism signaling the new importance of the pleasures of the table, appeared for the first time in 1800 as the title for a poem by Joseph Berchoux, *La Gastronomie, ou l’homme des champs à table*. Re-edited in 1803 and

translated into the major European languages, this poem is divided into four chants. The first offers a thumbnail history of what it sees as the uninspired and primitive culinary practices of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The remaining three, celebrating the pleasures of present day dining, draw their titles from the components of a well-served meal: First Service, Second Service, and Dessert. The chants devoted to contemporary gastronomy are, however, firmly anchored in history: in both the personal history of Berchoux's conflicted military service as a soldier of the Republic, and a more philosophical reflection on how pleasure has been redefined by ten years of intense social, political, and military tumult. Berchoux recalls how:

Naguères, dans ce temps de mémoire fatale,  
Où le crime planait sur ma terre natale,  
Effrayé, menacé par un monstre cruel,  
Forcé d'abandonner le banquet paternel,  
Je cherchai mon salut dans ces rangs militaires  
Formés par la terreur, et pourtant volontaires;  
Je m'armai tristement d'un fusil inhumain  
Qui jamais, grâce au ciel, n'a fait feu dans ma main.<sup>12</sup>

Before, during those times of deadly memory, / when crime flowed across my native land, / afraid and threatened by a cruel monster, / forced to leave the paternal banquet, / I sought my safety in military ranks / informed by terror but nonetheless voluntary. / I armed myself sadly with an inhumane rifle / that never, thanks be to heaven, was fired by my hand.

As concerns what the *soldat-gastronome* ate during his time as a soldier, each day brought only the antithesis of any feast (81):

Que de tristes festins nous attendaient le soir!  
Le pain du fournisseur était-il assez noir?  
Son bouillon assez clair et son vin assez rude?

What sad feasts awaited us each evening! / Was the quartermaster's bread tough enough? / His broth tasteless enough, and his wine rough enough?

Ultimately, the question posed by this poem composed some years after Berchoux's military experience is that of pleasure's very possibility in the wake of near civil war. In a world still reeling from the violent acts

perpetrated by revolutionaries and reactionaries alike, the only remedy would seem to lie in an amnesty bordering on amnesia (91):

Abstenez-vous surtout de remettre en mémoire  
Les crimes désastreux qui souillent notre histoire:  
Déplorable sujet d'un fatal entretien,  
Qui rappelle le mal sans ramener le bien.  
C'est assez que Clio noircisse ses chroniques  
Du récit douloureux des misères publiques.

Above all refrain from bringing back to memory / the disastrous crimes that pollute our history. / The deplorable subject of a fatal exchange / that recalls evil while bringing nothing good. / It is enough that Clio must darken her chronicles / with the painful story of our public miseries.

If this forgetting must abstain from all judgment, it is because every vector of violence, in whatever name it was inflicted, sprang from an equally culpable thirst for power (92):

De l'éclat du pouvoir ne soyez pas tenté:  
L'ambition détruit l'appétit, la santé.  
Assez d'infortunés, dans le siècle où nous sommes,  
Ont recherché le soin de commander aux hommes.  
Leurs désastres récents nous peuvent témoigner  
Quels maux sont attachés à l'honneur de régner.

Do not be tempted by the splendor of power. / Ambition destroys appetite and health. / Enough unfortunates, in this century that is ours, / have sought to command mankind. / Their recent disasters can testify / to the evils that accompany the honor of reigning.

The very possibility of any genuine conviviality as a sharing of pleasures depends instead on a self-distancing, a stepping outside of one's personal situation and sufferings (91):

Sachez rire de tout sans offenser personne.  
N'allez pas discourir, par l'exemple emporté,  
Sur les grands intérêts de la société;  
Faire au moment de boire un cours de politique;  
Lier les droits du peuple à la métaphysique.



Learn to laugh at everything while offending no one. / Refrain from running on, carried away by an example, / as to the great interests of society. / Never make the moment of a shared drink a course in politics, / grounding the rights of man in some metaphysics.

Berchoux's warning as to the dangers of what he calls "metaphysics" recalls Voltaire's use of that term to designate the divisive absurdity of religious doctrines that served only to set one group against another. His warning is that political ideologies, like the old metaphysics of theology, ultimately propose visions equally as nefarious as those of the churchmen. Promising earthly justice rather than eternal salvation, political pronouncements share with religious intolerance a radical incapacity to provide what they promise (89):

Cette froide raison, dont vous êtes si vains,  
Qu'a-t-elle fait encor pour changer vos destins?  
Où sont les heureux fruits des devoirs qu'elle impose?

That cold reason you so vainly deploy, / what has it done to change our destinies? / Where are the happy fruit of the duties it would impose.

As a reflection on how pleasure might be found again around the well-stocked table, *La Gastronomie* both acknowledges the painful reality of recent history and suggests that true conviviality involves an equality of shared pleasures possible only through a foreshortening of political theorizing (66):

Ah! si l'égalité doit régner dans le monde,  
C'est autour d'une table abondante et féconde;  
Là, sous le même empire et sous les mêmes lois,  
Les enfants de Comus ont tous les mêmes droits.

Ah! If equality is to reign in our world, / it is around an abundant and fruitful table. / There, under the same empire and the same laws, / the children of Comus all have the same rights.

An equally strong echo of history's recent tribulations can be heard in the signature work of the most eminent and influential of the nineteenth

century's new Epicureans of the table: Grimod de La Reynière. In a less personal and more bitingly ironic style, La Reynière brings the political and the culinary together within a shared metaphoric: "The Jacobins and the Directory put us on a diet for three years, and it was hardly their fault if it fell short of becoming a full-blown famine."<sup>13</sup> It was in the same year as Chazet's *L'École des gourmands*, 1804, that La Reynière began publishing his *Almanach des gourmands*, an annual that would continue to appear each year until 1812. The son of a rich tax collector (who could well have served as a model for Chazet's Gourmandin), La Reynière developed within his disquisitions on food a style that was neither poetic nor theatrical. Aggressive and comprehensive, the *Almanach* adopts a learned tone that reads almost as a parody of the encyclopedic style of the Enlightenment philosophers. Speaking almost as an anthropologist, La Reynière describes his project as an attempt to understand the social function of life's most frequent—but also most overlooked—source of pleasure:

I am astounded that no writer has treated this matter with the seriousness it deserves and that there exists no truly philosophical analysis of dining. Yet how much there is to say about this memorable act that repeats itself three hundred sixty-five times each year.<sup>14</sup>

La Reynière defines his culinary reflections as a response to what he sees as the indisputable fact that French society in the opening years of the nineteenth century has been profoundly and irreversibly transformed by the Revolution and its sequels. The masters of today are no longer those of yesterday. The aristocracy's criteria of blood and lineage have yielded to the new forces of wealth and influence. Given this radical New Deal, the question becomes: can the eighteenth century's Epicureanism transform itself in such a way as to re-establish pleasure as a social value? In terms of its material life, the France of 1808 is no longer impoverished; she is no longer at war with herself. In the preface to his *Manuel des Amphitryons*—a compilation drawn from the first five years of his *Almanach*—La Reynière sets out to draw the portrait of this France reborn. Sustained by the return of prosperity, guided by imperial order, a nature entirely reanimated is ready to orchestrate all its elements toward a re-establishment of the table as the new locus of pleasure:

The return of a solid currency has slowly restored confidence and we have seen our markets come alive to the sounds of gold and silver. Those superb blocks of Gournay and Isigny

butter, which we thought forever melted away, reappeared more ample and more brilliant than ever. Cattle from Auvergne and from Normandy pressed their ponderous pace to present themselves more quickly to the knives of butchers who marveled at their sight. Sheep from Beauvais, from Cotentin, and from the Ardennes ran as quickly as they could toward their metamorphosis into chops and legs of lamb.<sup>15</sup>

The mock-enthusiasm of this fantastical imagining of a nature and society joyously reinvigorated by the return of the table's pleasures sets La Reynière in clear opposition to the positions of his stylistic model: the eighteenth-century philosophers who contributed to Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*. For those guiding *philosophes*, food and its preparation were considered from a uniformly utilitarian and even moralistic point of view. All the refinements that would come to be associated with the gourmet and gastronomy were for them milestones on the road toward cultural decadence and individual deviance.<sup>16</sup> The *Encyclopédie* article titled "Gourmandise" succinctly dismisses it as "a refined and inordinate liking for good cooking ... prized in countries given over to luxury and vanity where vices are saluted as virtues. It is the fruit of opulent indolence."<sup>17</sup> Food preparation in general is relegated to the inferior status of a mechanical art lacking any esthetic dimension. The article "Cuisine" sets the simple and utilitarian practices it recommends in opposition to what it calls "gastrology" defined as "a system of hidden tricks meant to induce people to eat far more than necessary." True cuisine, the article cautions, must concern itself only with "those everyday ways of preparing food that satisfies the needs of life." Any deviation from the simply nourishing toward refinements intended to add some dimension of pleasure to the experience of eating evoke the decadence of imperial Rome or oriental despotism as societies whose food degenerated into "a kind of poison" totally unlike the "useful and simple foods fostering sustenance and health."<sup>18</sup>

The intended audience for La Reynière's *Manuel des Amphytrions* is designated by a name borrowed from Greek mythology and French comedy. Setting aside any connotation of cuckoldry, La Reynière embraces Molière's succinct description of that character: "The real Amphytrion is the one who gives us dinner."<sup>19</sup> As a would-be perfect host, La Reynière's intended reader is presumed to be of sufficient means to entertain his guests lavishly. As we are in the first decade of the nineteenth century, this means the newly rich in a post-revolutionary France that had expelled or

impoverished the aristocracy of the *ancien régime*. If these new masters need a manual, it is because, for most, modest origins and limited educations have hardly prepared them for the fine art of presiding over receptions devoted to fine dining. The *Manuel* makes clear that the art of “receiving” must first and foremost be understood as an art of “giving.” For La Reynière, the gift offered to another in the form of a refined dinner is a fundamental and even sacred duty incumbent upon those who, thanks to the accidents of history, find themselves able to do so. La Reynière describes his book as “a kind of catechism to be studied carefully as the source of a knowledge initiating them to the art of living well and making others live well [*l’art de bien vivre et de bien faire vivre les autres*]. These are the twin modalities of being happy and making others happy” (xxxv). Governed by a “code of reciprocal duties,” the dinner orchestrated by a true Amphytrion must become an exchange of his own careful “intentions” toward the others and a “reciprocal kindness” [*complaisance*] toward him on the part of his guests. Taken together, these duties constitute what La Reynière calls “*la politesse gourmande*” (xxxiv). Given this goal of schooling his readers in a new form of *politesse*, his *Manuel* should be read as “having far more to do with morals and the ways of the world than with cooking” (xxxv).

The attentive host must make of his shared dinner a ceremony during which the pleasures of the table, offered by him and received by his guests, have as their effect the creation of a new and enchanted conviviality. In the chapter titled *Des Propos de Table*, La Reynière makes clear that this new mini-society achieves its high point less by reason of what is tasted than within a “*douce hilarité*” consisting of (236):

friendly effusions born of a redoubled gratitude toward the host as he who has taken as much care to showcase his guests’ wit as to offering them a fine meal; and all the guests will strive to offer as their tribute to the host’s gifts the full fruit of their verve and eloquence.

In a later chapter, La Reynière enumerates what he sees as “the respective duties of guests and host.” For him, the “*politesse gourmande*” to which he would initiate his readers becomes a code of conduct animating what amounts to a new social contract. All that happens at the host’s table, the conversations he orchestrates as well as the dishes he offers, come together within a fundamentally Epicurean reciprocity of pleasures seen as the animating principle of any true society (243, 249–50):

Reciprocity is the law of all life, and a society must sustain itself as a concatenation of respective duties joining the inferior to the superior, the benefactor to the recipient, and the Amphitryon to his guest ... . As it is reciprocal needs that bind men together most tightly, and as a dinner must have guests as well as a host, all involved have a real interest in accommodating one another and in living well together.

The finesse and delicate attentiveness toward the other at the heart of this “*politesse gourmande*” are clear from the *Manuel*’s very organization. The entire first section, making up a full third of the work, brings together articles drawn from the earlier *Almanachs* to which La Reynière gave the collective title “The Art of Carving.” Proper carving—be it of such meats as beef, lamb, pork, and rabbit; of some eighteen varieties of fowl; or of five kinds of fish—is so crucial a propaedeutic to the host’s role that to imagine him ignorant of that art, would be, as La Reynière puts it, as absurd as imagining a bibliophile who is unable to read. The true artistry of carving is less a response to the anatomical irregularities of bone, tendon, and muscle than it is a careful attention to assuring that an appearance of equality characterizes all the individual portions that the host will place on the serving plate. The real art of carving allows the host to dissect whatever is being served in such a way that each guest’s individual choice will take place from an array of options defying any obvious division into more and less desirable morsels. Reciprocally, it is the duty of each guest, when making his choice from the serving plate, to take whichever portion happens to be closest to him. Should it happen that a guest prefers a specific cut, he may take it—but on the condition that, in so doing, he refrain from demonstrating any personal preference endangering the appearance of equality (215):

If a guest presumes to choose, that choice must be executed with a skill and agility making it appear to all that he is taking the portion that happened to be offered him.

The delicate reciprocity at the core of *la politesse gourmande* is meant to address what La Reynière sees as an all too prevalent ignorance of the liabilities incumbent upon any host who forgets the larger social implications of his status as someone who happens to have been favored by the vicissitudes of fortune (262):

The more one’s rank is elevated, the more one’s wealth is considerable ... the more one is obliged to be solicitous, affectionate, and polite. It is only by reason of these qualities,

combined with an amenity that today so rarely accompanies higher station, that one has any chance of being pardoned one's titles and one's wealth.

Behind his careful attention to the details of culinary procedure, one finds also in La Reynière a realism that brooks no illusions. If, behind every gesture properly executed by the host, there is an implicit request to be pardoned, it is because, as he puts it, "all men are inclined toward envy" (263). More than anything else, it is its status as a response to this ubiquitous but unspoken envy that makes the art of hosting, *la politesse gourmande*, so nuanced and demanding (263):

The benefactor must make his gifts pleasing by offering them with a graciousness without which they would be of no value in the eyes of a sensitive man. It is by lifting the person he is gratifying up to his own level, by closing the distance between them, and by treating his guest as his equal, that the host acquires a real right to his guest's gratitude.

It is within the motivating dynamics of his *politesse gourmande* that we see how profoundly La Reynière's Epicureanism differs from its Enlightenment version. Behind the attention to culinary detail, La Reynière enumerates careful protocols that establish the table as the venue for an exchange of pleasures that invoke far more than the pure present of delighted sensation. To the contrary, the true *Amphitryon* is the conjurer of a magic intended to create at his table an exchange of pleasures cognizant of, yet at the same time able to suspend within their confected conviviality, the resentments born within the helter-skelter vicissitudes of history. This focus of early nineteenth-century Epicureanism on the pleasures of the table sets it distinctly apart from its eighteenth-century variant and the algebra of conflicted subjectivities informing its epics of sexual seduction. Within the resolutely tactical Epicureanism of *libertinage*, other persons might well be one's partners in pleasure, but that pleasure never involved any utopia of forgotten inequalities and injustices. To the contrary, the lesson to be learned from traditional *libertinage* turned on achieving a protective distance of the self from passion's illusions and their power to subjugate one partner to the other.

In his *Traité de la Vie Élégante* of 1830, Balzac takes up the question of how much the Revolution has changed French society. Trying to capture in a brief formulation the cumulative effects of its wrenching upheavals, he speaks of a world now dominated by "a metaphysics of things."<sup>20</sup> In their

different ways, Chazet, Berchoux, and La Reynière help us to understand why Balzac would choose that unstable oxymoron to describe the spirit of his age. The three works considered here speak of a complex interplay between the proclaimed and the hidden, between a confected metaphysics and an elided historicity. And it is the weight of this tension that gives so different a coloration to post-revolutionary and proto-democratic Epicureanism. In the new society of elegance Balzac would describe, value, distinction, and pleasure are no longer grounded in the practices of any undisputed elite or recognized aristocracy. Elegance is generated not as a congruence with recognized paragons, but by an array of coveted objects, of precious things promising status and pleasure. Within this changed dynamic of pleasure, the richly furnished table became the favored site of a politics based on the sharing of promised delights as emblems of desire, value, and elegance. Around the Epicure's table, the sentient subject may find himself enchanted by its myriad delicacies, but that enchantment served also to exorcise an unspoken but very real history of winners and losers. The careful protocols of the table are centered on and strive to confirm the seductive power of things. Within this new Epicureanism, shared pleasures must above all maintain the illusion that they derive their value and power from qualities seen as inherent to things themselves as hallmarks of distinction, refinement, and elegance. Chazet, Berchoux, and La Reynière speak to us, each in their different way, of the challenges and subterfuges involved in fashioning, within society's cauldron of universal envy, a redemptive conviviality of gustatory delights, a "metaphysics of things."

Above all, Balzac's pithy formulation brings into focus how different the nineteenth-century Epicurean is from his *ancien régime* ancestor. If anything, Enlightenment Epicureanism insisted, as we saw with Voltaire, not on a "metaphysics of things," but on what might be termed a "thingification of metaphysics." More than anything else, the Epicurean materialism of the eighteenth century challenged the existence of any realm beyond matter—the very notion that there is any difference in kind between the inanimate and the animate. The same complex interplay of ever-swerving atoms presided over both things and the sensations, pulsions, and thoughts of men and animals. This refusal of the metaphysical was profoundly subversive. Echoing the Lucretian challenge to all gods, Gassendi and his disciples denounced as illusions all the tenets of an



established Church whose metaphysics provided the philosophical foundation for a monarchy of divine right.

Given this past, it is ironic that, refashioned by the upheavals of the Revolution, the Epicurean password of “pleasure,” shifting from the sexual to the culinary, should come to be associated with an alchemy of the table promising a reconciliation of equality and refinement outside the memory of history. Looked at in this way, *Préfet* Dubois’s startling invocation of a newly imagined “freedom of pleasures” signals the fact that during the nineteenth century the heritage of eighteenth-century Epicureanism would take two very divergent paths. One path, the one I have tried to describe here, leads to a consumer society in which an ever-broadening celebration of seductive objects, freely available to all, provide the foundations of a new sense of identity, elegance, and pleasure. The other path, extending to History itself the materialism of pre-Revolutionary Epicureanism, would set out to stand Hegel on his head within a dialectical materialism proposing class struggle as the essential dynamic of capitalist societies. That, of course, is a very different story. But, even without telling it, Chazet, Berchoux, and La Reynière help us to understand why, although Karl Marx may have titled his doctoral thesis “The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature,” neither he nor his disciples would be associated with Epicureanism as it evolved over the course of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> Valois, *Mémoires*, 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal des débats*, 27 Ventôse, An VIII [March 17, 1800] 4.

<sup>3</sup> On this subject, see Kavanagh, *Enlightened Pleasures*.

<sup>4</sup> D'Ivernois, *Des causes*, 203.

<sup>5</sup> Vieuzeac, *Réponse*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> "epicure, n.," *OED Online*.

<sup>7</sup> Greenblatt, *The Swerve*.

<sup>8</sup> Diderot and d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie*, 1.1196.

<sup>9</sup> Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right*.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, *A Natural History of Revolution*.

<sup>11</sup> Chazet, *L'École des gourmands*, 9. The title page includes as authors Lafortelle and Francis in addition to Chazet. All subsequent quotations from this work are followed by parentheses enclosing the page number according to this edition. The translations are my own.

<sup>12</sup> Berchoux, *La gastronomie*, 80–81. All subsequent quotations from this work are followed by parentheses enclosing the page number according to this edition. The translations are my own.

<sup>13</sup> La Reynière, *Manuel*, xxix. All subsequent quotations from this work are followed by parentheses enclosing the page number according to this edition. The translations are my own.

<sup>14</sup> La Reynière, *Variétés Gourmandes*, 62.

<sup>15</sup> La Reynière, *Manuel*, xxix.

<sup>16</sup> It is for this reason that Jean-Claude Bonnet qualifies the *Encyclopédie* as pre-gastronomic: "[For the *encyclopédistes*,] the art of cooking must not be a sybaritic, corrupting luxury, but an honest and innocent art that gives sustenance and wholesome pleasure." See his "The Culinary System in the *Encyclopédie*," 155. On the treatment of food in the *Encyclopédie*, see also Sprang, *The Invention of the Restaurant*, 50–63; and Spary, "Making a Science of Taste," 170–82.

<sup>17</sup> Diderot and d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie*, 2.209.

<sup>18</sup> Diderot and d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie*, 1.849.

<sup>19</sup> Molière, *L'Amphitryon*, III, 5 [1668].

<sup>20</sup> Balzac, *Traité de la vie élégante*, 12.226.

## CHAPTER 28

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# THOMAS JEFFERSON

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CARL J. RICHARD

THOMAS JEFFERSON combined elements of Epicureanism with components of Stoicism and Christianity to form a unique philosophy. While Jefferson derived from the Stoics and from Cicero the belief in an innate moral sense and from Christianity the concepts of a creator, a resurrection, and an afterlife, as well as a system of ethics based on positive benevolence, Epicureanism provided him with other essential features of his philosophy, such as a materialist metaphysics and consequent rejection of miracles, an emphasis on the role played by reason (logic) acting on experience in uncovering truth, and a belief in free will.

Although on one occasion, when in a radical empiricist mood, Thomas Jefferson accused one of his favorite British authors, Lord Kames, of being “too metaphysical” and on another called theology “charlatanry of the mind,” he did not lack metaphysical or theological views. Jefferson considered the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers the two best guides for metaphysics, Jesus the best guide for ethics. In 1803 Jefferson wrote regarding the classical philosophers:

Their precepts related chiefly to ourselves, and the government of those passions which, unrestrained, would disturb our tranquility of mind. In this branch of philosophy they were really great. In developing our duties to others, they were short and defective.

Similarly, he declared in 1819:

Epictetus and Epicurus give laws for governing ourselves, Jesus a supplement of the duties and charities we owe to others.<sup>1</sup>

Often citing the Stoics and Cicero, Jefferson spoke of the existence of a “moral sense,” a term for intuition popularized by eighteenth-century Scottish philosophers. Having read and copied the Stoics long before he became familiar with Scottish moral philosophy, Jefferson believed that everyone possessed a moral sense that God had implanted in humans to ensure the preservation of the race. Not everyone listened to his moral sense; a plowman might decide a moral case better than a professor, if the professor were “led astray by artificial rules.” But if people listened to their moral sense, they would find that it revealed the same things to each of them. Thus, Jefferson wrote that ethics should be taught at the University of Virginia as “moral obligations ... in which all sects agree,” and praised the Quakers for rallying around their common ethics, rather than fragmenting over theological points.<sup>2</sup>

Like the Stoics and Cicero, but unlike Plato, Jefferson envisioned the moral sense as a mere instinct for virtue that required training (reason acting on experience) to develop into full-blown virtue, rather than as a collection of innate ideas. When witnessing examples of virtue in their daily lives, children instinctively sought to reproduce it. Conversely, children who rarely experienced virtuous behavior could not develop their moral sense to its full potential. Jefferson used an enlightening analogy to explain this concept of the moral sense:

The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of a man as his leg or arm. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body.... In this branch, therefore, read good books, because they will encourage as well as direct your feelings.

Jefferson identified such books as Cicero’s philosophical writings, the Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius’s *Meditations*, and the essays of the Stoic philosopher and statesman Seneca.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, despite Jefferson’s un-Epicurean belief in the existence of a moral sense, he identified Epicurus, the Athenian whom John Stuart Mill would later acknowledge as the founder of Utilitarianism, as his favorite philosopher. In 1800 Jefferson compiled “A Syllabus of the Doctrines of

Epicurus.” In 1816 he termed Epicurean philosophy “the most rational system remaining of the philosophy of the ancients, as frugal of vicious indulgence, and fruitful of virtue as the hyperbolic extravagancies of rival sects.” In an 1819 letter, having stated that the doctrines of Epicurus contained “everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us,” Jefferson summarized these doctrines:

The Universe eternal . . . Matter and Void alone . . . Gods, an order of beings next superior to man, enjoying in their sphere, their own felicities, but not meddling with the concerns of the scale of beings below them . . . Happiness the aim of life. Virtue the foundation of happiness. Utility the test of virtue . . . The *summum bonum* [ultimate good] is to be not pained in body, nor troubled in mind. . . . To procure tranquility of mind we must avoid desire and fear, the two principal diseases of the mind. Man is a free agent. Virtue consists in: 1. Prudence. 2. Temperance. 3. Fortitude. 4. Justice. To which are opposed, 1. Folly. 2. Desire. 3. Fear. 4. Deceit.<sup>4</sup>

There is evidence that Jefferson embraced some aspects of Epicureanism long before he compiled the syllabus of Epicurean doctrines in 1800. As early as the 1750s Jefferson had copied into his literary commonplace book two materialist passages from Cicero. The first passage declared (*Tusc. Disp.* 1.11):

For if the soul is the heart or blood or brain, then assuredly, since it is material, it will perish with the rest of the body; if it is breath it will perhaps be dispersed in space; if fire it will be quenched.

The second exclaimed (1.16):

And such was the extent of deception . . . that though they knew that the bodies of the dead were consumed with fire, yet they imagined that events took place in the lower world which cannot take place without bodies.

In 1786 Jefferson’s library contained the first-century Roman Epicurean Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, one of the few surviving ancient summaries of Epicurean doctrines. In that year Jefferson wrote an anguished letter to his love interest, Maria Cosway, from whom he had just parted. Jefferson included in the letter a dialogue between his head and his heart. His head contended:

The art of life is the art of avoiding pain . . . The most effectual means of being secure against pain is to retire within ourselves . . . For nothing is ours which another may deprive us of. Hence the inestimable value of intellectual pleasures. Ever in our power, always

leading us to something new, never cloying, we ride sublime above the concerns of this mortal world, contemplating truth and nature, matter and motion, the laws which bind up their existence, and that eternal being who made and bound them up by these laws.

Except for the significant reference to a creator in place of Epicurus's eternal universe, this was an Epicurean manifesto.<sup>5</sup>

Although Jefferson adopted the Stoic concept of the moral sense and found comfort in the Stoic emphasis on the patient endurance of misfortune, he denounced certain aspects of Stoicism. He rejected the Stoics' doctrine of a separable soul and their fatalism and was angered by their misrepresentation of the Epicurean philosophy as mere hedonism. In 1819 Jefferson argued:

Epictetus, indeed, has given us what was good of the Stoics; all beyond, of their dogmas, being hypocrisy and grimace. Their great crime was in their calumnies of Epicurus and misrepresentations of his doctrines, in which we lament to see the candid character of Cicero engaging as an accomplice . . . Seneca is indeed a fine moralist, disfiguring his work at times with some Stoicisms.<sup>6</sup>

Jefferson applauded the Epicurean emphasis on reason acting on experience. He considered reason and intuition the two chief guides that God had implanted in humans for the preservation of the race. While both reason and intuition were ethical guides, reason alone was the guide for metaphysics. In 1814 Jefferson claimed:

Dispute as long as we will on religious tenets, our reason at last must ultimately decide, as it is the only oracle which God has given us to determine between what really comes from Him and the phantasms of a disordered or deluded imagination.

Although reason had to act on information provided by the senses, Jefferson was equally convinced of their reliability. In 1820 he declared, "A single sense may sometimes be deceived, but rarely, and never all our senses together." Hence Jefferson regarded religious liberty as crucial; for if men were free to think as they chose, reason would surely lead them in the same direction. In 1813 he asserted:

If thinking men would have the courage to think for themselves, and to speak what they think, it would be found that they do not differ in religious opinions as much as is supposed.



What would such “thinking men” believe? They would believe in a creator, not on the basis of a superstitious acceptance of revelation but on the basis of the intricate design of the universe. Furthermore, they would adopt a particular brand of Christianity. In 1812 Jefferson made a prediction regarding the future religion of his free country:

I trust there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die an Unitarian.

Just as free inquiry in the Roman Empire had produced Christianity (a rather odd view, given Roman persecution of early Christians), free inquiry in America would produce a form of Christian Epicureanism. Thinking men freely using their reason would be Thomas Jefferson.<sup>7</sup>

Although Jefferson’s chief guide for ethics was Jesus, it was Jesus viewed through an Epicurean lens. Taking his cue from a book called *Jesus and Socrates Compared*, written by his friend Joseph Priestley, Jefferson frequently made the same comparison. He contended that the doctrines of both Socrates and Jesus had been corrupted. Plato had used “the name of Socrates to cover the whimsies of his own brain,” and his dialogues were “libels on Socrates.” Xenophon’s *Memorabilia of Socrates* was the only source for the unadulterated philosophy of the Athenian.<sup>8</sup>

The doctrines of Jesus, on the other hand, had been corrupted by three groups: his inept and superstitious biographers, conniving Platonists, and illogical Calvinists. This corruption was tragic, Jefferson lamented, because:

Had the doctrines of Jesus been preached always as pure as they came from his lips, the whole civilized world would now have been Christian.

Jefferson contended that “fragments only of what he did deliver have come to us mutilated, misstated, and often unintelligible,” and complained of “the follies, the falsehoods, and the charlatanisms” that Jesus’s biographers foisted upon him. Jefferson trusted, however, that “the dawn of reason and freedom of thought in the United States” would tear down “the artificial scaffolding” set up by these biographers. He concluded, “And the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter.”<sup>9</sup>

Worse yet, Platonists, intent on establishing and maintaining power for a dissolute class of priests, had afterwards engrafted onto Christianity the “sophisms” of that pernicious philosopher. After reading Plato’s *Republic* in 1814, Jefferson subjected John Adams to this diatribe:

While wading thro’ the whimsies, the puerilities, and unintelligible jargon of this work, I laid it down often to ask myself how it could have been that the world should have so long consented to give reputation to such nonsense as this? In truth, he [Plato] is one of the race of the genuine Sophists, who has escaped the oblivion of his brethren, first by the elegance of his diction, but chiefly by the adoption and incorporation of his whimsies into the body of artificial Christianity. His foggy mind is forever presenting the semblances of objects which, half seen thro’ a mist, can be defined neither in form or dimension. Yet this which should have consigned him to early oblivion really procured him immortality of fame and reverence. The Christian priesthood, finding the doctrines of Jesus leveled to every understanding, and too plain to need explanation, saw in the mysticisms of Plato materials with which they might build an artificial system which might, from its indistinctiveness, admit everlasting controversy, give employment for their order, and introduce it to profit, power, and pre-eminence. The doctrines which flowed from the lips of Jesus himself are within the comprehension of a child; but thousands of volumes have not yet explained the Platonisms engrafted on them; and for the obvious reason that nonsense can never be explained . . . . It is fortunate for us that Platonic republicanism has not obtained the same favor as Platonic Christianity, or we should now have been all living, men, women, and children, pell mell together, like beasts of the field or forest.

Jefferson concluded that it was such Platonists, appealing to mystical and absurd doctrines like that of the Holy Trinity in their effort to establish their individual sects as the national religions of the United States and Great Britain, who were slandering him and his friend Priestley for their religious opinions. But Jefferson hoped that Christians would not, in the end, “give up morals for mysteries, and Jesus for Plato.”<sup>10</sup>

Jefferson believed that Calvinists had further obscured matters by adding the absurd doctrine of predestination to the Christian baggage. In his beloved Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom (1779) Jefferson emphasized the Epicurean doctrine of free will, writing, “Almighty God hath created the mind free ... [and] being lord of both body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do, *but to extend it by its influence on reason alone.*” (The Virginia Senate deleted the italicized words.) In a clearer attack on Calvinism in 1823, Jefferson wrote to John Adams:

I can never join Calvin in addressing his god . . . . If ever man worshipped a false god, he did. The being described in his 5 points is not the God whom you and I acknowledge and

adore, the Creator and benevolent governor of the world; but a daemon of malignant spirit. It would be more pardonable to believe in no god at all than to blaspheme him by the atrocious attributes of Calvin.

In the previous year Jefferson had caricatured the “5 points of Calvin” as:

1. That there are three Gods. 2. That good works, or the love of our neighbor, are nothing. 3. That faith is everything, and the more incomprehensible the proposition, the more merit in its faith. 4. That reason in religion is of unlawful use. 5. That God, from the beginning, elected certain individuals to be saved, and certain others to be damned; and that no crimes of the former can damn them, no virtues of the latter save.

Unfortunately, Jefferson substituted such ridicule and distortion of Calvinist theology for a rational explanation of the sense in which the human will could be free.<sup>11</sup>

In short, Jefferson concluded that both Jesus and Socrates had been Epicureans like himself. In 1820 he wrote dogmatically: “To speak of an immaterial soul is to say there is no soul or god; it is to be an atheist. Jesus taught none of it.” Jesus had been a materialist:

He told us indeed that “God is a spirit,” but he has not defined what a spirit is, nor said that it is not matter. And the ancient fathers, generally, if not universally, held it to be matter.

Similarly, in 1824, Jefferson contended that Jesus had taught that the sole afterlife was that experienced by the body after resurrection at the end of the age, not that experienced by a separable soul upon death. On this point Jefferson was only partially Epicurean: although Epicurus, like Jefferson, denied the existence of a separable soul, he also denied the existence of an afterlife, maintaining that death was nothingness (Lucr. *DRN* 3.323–58, 417–58). This is one of the significant areas in which Jefferson’s Christianity got the better of his Epicureanism. Jefferson also rejected the view that Jesus had ever held any pretensions to supernatural powers. In 1803 Jefferson declared:

I am a Christian in the only sense in which he wished any one to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every human excellence; and believing he never claimed any other.

The *logos* (“the Word”) that had been with God from the beginning, as related in the first chapter of John, did not refer to the Holy Trinity but to

reason. In the same fashion Jefferson speculated that the *daemon* (divine entity) that Socrates claimed spoke to him was also reason:

He was too wise to believe, and too honest to pretend, that he had real and familiar converse with a superior and invisible being. He probably considered the suggestions of his conscience, or reason, as revelations, or inspirations from the Supreme mind, bestowed, on important occasions, by a special superintending providence.<sup>12</sup>

How was Jefferson able to extract the true Epicurean meaning of the doctrines of Jesus and Socrates from their corrupt texts—to separate the diamonds from the dung hill, as he put it? Through the use of “reason,” of course. In 1813 Jefferson explained how he had compiled his famous Bible:

We must reduce our volume to the simple evangelists, select, even from them, the very words of Jesus, paring off the Amphibologisms into which they had been led by forgetting often, or not understanding, what had fallen from him, by giving their own misconceptions as his dicta, and expressing unintelligibly for others what they had not understood themselves. There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man.

In 1820 Jefferson contended that he was trying to “rescue His [Jesus’s] character.” He wrote regarding Jesus’s perfect morals (as manifested in “humility, innocence, and simplicity of manners, neglect of riches, [and] absence of worldly ambition and honors”): “These could not be the invention of the groveling authors who relate them. They are far beyond the powers of their feeble minds.” True, even after completing the distillation process, one was left with some objectionable passages, but these might be explained by Jesus’s need to escape the clutches of bloodthirsty priests. Jefferson then performed the same operation on Socrates, paring away the same fatty tissue with the same scalpel (reason) to reach the same Epicurean heart: “When, therefore, Plato puts into his mouth such paralogisms, such quibbles on words, and sophisms as a schoolboy would be ashamed of, we conclude that they are the whimsies of Plato’s own foggy brain and acquit Socrates of puerilities so unlike his character.”<sup>13</sup>

Jefferson ignored conflicting evidence. John clearly intended the *logos* to signify Jesus. He concluded the discussion of the *logos* with, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” and followed this with a narrative of Jesus’s life. In addition, both Plato and Xenophon related prominent instances in which Socrates demonstrated faith in the oracle of Delphi. In

Plato's *Apology* (20d–21b) Socrates stated that it was faith in the oracle that had launched him on his mission to examine others, leading ultimately to his trial. When the oracle, a priestess who served as the voice of Apollo, had declared that Socrates was the wisest man in the world, the statement had seemed so odd to the philosopher that he had been determined to discover what the god really meant. The Athenian did not doubt for a moment that Apollo spoke through the oracle. “What does the god mean, and what riddle does he pose?” Socrates asked himself:

For I am not conscious of being wise, either in great or in small things. What does he mean, then, in saying that I am the wisest? For he certainly does not lie.

In Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, a work Jefferson highly recommended as the most accurate source on Socrates,<sup>14</sup> Socrates urged Xenophon to seek the oracle's advice before embarking on his ill-fated Persian expedition. Socrates's faith in the oracle proves that he believed in divine intervention in human affairs, contrary to the doctrines of Epicurus, and that he may well have believed that a god spoke directly to him. Central to the works that contain them, these famous passages could hardly have escaped Jefferson's notice.

Why did Jefferson ignore these conspicuous passages? The answer seems to lie in his desire to “rescue Jesus's character”—and Socrates's as well. Enamored of their ethics (particularly Jesus's), which possessed a warmth and sense of benevolence absent from utilitarian calculus, Jefferson was determined that their metaphysics should also match his own Epicurean metaphysics. In this way alone could he feel comfortable in defending their ethics against the onslaughts of materialist detractors. In Jefferson's dialogue between his Epicurean head and his Christian heart, the heart informed the head that happiness was not “the mere absence of pain” and that the warmth of friendship was a necessary comfort in life. Here we catch a glimpse of why Jefferson's Christianity, with its emphasis on loving others, was as necessary to his emotional health as Greek philosophy, which merely taught the avoidance of self-injury and injury to others. But Jefferson was too much the rationalist to surrender complete control of his head to his heart. Instead, he twisted and contorted the two to make them compatible. Jefferson was a true “heretic” in the original sense of the Greek word: “one who picks and chooses” those elements of a philosophical

system he likes, discarding the others. Ironically, Jefferson's reconciliation of Epicureanism and Christianity required an immense leap of faith from this leading figure of the Age of Reason.<sup>15</sup>

Jefferson also departed from Epicureanism in another important sense: he rejected its teaching that the gods did not intervene in the universe. In 1823 Jefferson was emphatic in refuting the doctrine of divine noninterference. He wrote to John Adams regarding the universe:

It is impossible, I say, for the human mind not to believe that there is, in all this, design, cause and effect, up to an ultimate cause, a fabricator of all things from matter and motion, their preserver and regulator while permitted to exist in their present forms, and their regenerator into new and other forms.

Jefferson then elaborated on this reference to the need for a Regulator and Regenerator as well as a Creator:

We see too evident proofs of the necessity of a superintending power to maintain the Universe in its course and order. Stars, well known, have disappeared; new ones have come into view; comets, in their incalculable courses, may run afoul of suns and planets and require renovation under other laws; certain races of animals are become extinct; and were there no restoring power, all existences might extinguish successively, one by one, until all should be reduced to a shapeless chaos.<sup>16</sup>

This letter was no aberration. Throughout his life Jefferson often expressed confidence in what was then called "divine Providence." Like nearly all of the other founders, Jefferson believed that God was a partisan on behalf of human liberty. In 1795 he wrote regarding the success of Dutch republicans, with the help of the French, in driving out the stadtholder William IV and establishing a more democratic system:

It proves there is a god in heaven, and he will not slumber without end on the iniquities of [such] tyrants, or would-be tyrants, as their Stadtholder.

In 1800 Jefferson claimed that God often brought about good through misfortune, writing:

When great evils happen, I am in the habit of looking out for what good may arise from them as consolations to us, and Providence has in fact so established the order of things as that most evils are the means of producing some good.

Jefferson often closed his letters with promises to pray for the recipient and his nation, promises that implied belief in an intervening God who answered prayers.<sup>17</sup>

But while Jefferson generally perceived God's role as a defender of human freedom as a current source of blessing for the United States, he sometimes feared it could become a future source of disaster. In *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1782) Jefferson expressed his anxiety that slavery would bring down God's wrath on the United States. In a famous passage later engraved on a panel at the Jefferson Memorial he wrote:

Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever; that considering numbers, nature, and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation is among possible events; that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest.

Note that Jefferson's anxiety was not for himself as a slaveholder but for the nation as a whole, and that he fully expected divine retribution to come through natural means. Not generally known for dispensing jeremiads, Jefferson added a hopeful postscript more in line with his optimistic disposition:

The spirit of the master is abating, that of the slave rising from the dust, his condition mollifying, the way I hope preparing, under the auspices of heaven, for a total emancipation, and that this is disposed, in the order of events, to be with the consent of the masters rather than by their extirpation.

Yet Jefferson clearly saw "total emancipation" as the inevitable result of the divine will. The only question was whether it would come by peaceful means or by slaughter. A few years later he wrote:

What a stupendous, what an incomprehensible machine is man! Who can endure toil, famine, stripes, imprisonment, and death itself in vindication of his own liberty and the next moment be deaf to all those motives whose power supported him through his trial, and inflict on his fellow men a bondage one hour of which is fraught with more misery than ages of that which he rose in rebellion to oppose. But we must await with patience the workings of an overruling Providence and hope that it is preparing the deliverance of these, our suffering brethren. When the measure of their tears shall be full, when their groans shall have involved heaven itself in darkness, doubtless, a God of justice will awaken to their distress, and by suffusing light and liberality among their oppressors, or, at length, by His



exterminating thunder, manifest His attention to the things of this world, and they are not left to the guidance of a blind fatality.

Jefferson again presented the possibility that divine intervention might take the form of enlightenment rather than destruction, though the latter was still possible.<sup>18</sup>

Although Jefferson's Epicureanism did not lead him to reject the doctrine of divine Providence commonly held in his day, it contributed greatly to his belief that God worked solely through natural causes to achieve his ends. There is no record of Jefferson's ever having expressed a belief in any miracle. On the contrary, when compiling his own famous Bible, he excluded all biblical accounts of them.<sup>19</sup>

While the intricacies of Jefferson's theology were unique, some of the other leading founders of the United States shared its most essential elements: a fondness for Jesus's ethics combined with a rejection of his divinity. Benjamin Franklin stated that while he did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, he did not mind others so believing, since it would make them more likely to follow Jesus's moral teachings, which he regarded as superior to all others. While some of the founders, such as Patrick Henry and Benjamin Rush, were fairly orthodox Christians, others, like Jefferson and Franklin, interwove Christianity and classical philosophy. Under the shadow of new scientific theories that had reduced the universe to a set of natural laws, these founders could no longer accept the traditional Christian belief in miracles. They now required rational "proofs" for the existence of God and the afterlife, as well as earthly rewards for virtue, in case the afterlife proved an illusion.<sup>20</sup>

But the psychological need to retain some elements of Christianity proved as strong, for three reasons. First, like the early Christian converts of the Roman Empire, the founders preferred the warmth and benevolence of Christianity to the cold obligations of classical philosophy. After reminding his Epicurean head of the numerous times in which the head had chosen safety over aiding those in need, Thomas Jefferson's Christian heart concluded:

In short, my friend, as far as my recollection serves me, I do not know that I ever did a good thing on your suggestion, or a dirty one without it.

After expressing admiration for *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, with its maxims on the sanctity of oaths, the respect due to parents, affection for friends, and connection to mankind, John Adams nevertheless added:

How dark, mean, and meagre are these Golden Verses, however celebrated and really curious, in comparison with the Sermon on the Mount and the Psalms of David or the Decalogue!

Second, the doctrine of the Resurrection and the afterlife provided tremendous comfort in an age of lower life expectancies. Epicureanism rejected the concept of the afterlife, and the Stoic afterlife was too abstract for most people's taste. By reinterpreting Christianity in a classical light, some of the founders could expect to have their cake of earthly progress and eat it in heaven. Finally, the reconciliation of Christianity with classical philosophy served a vital emotional function: it saved the unorthodox founders from the painful necessity of abandoning the religion of their ancestors and of their countrymen.<sup>21</sup>

The founders responded to unprecedented philosophical needs as they responded to unprecedented political needs: by returning to the same font of classical wisdom that had quenched their thirst in youth. The historian Joyce Appleby was only half right when she wrote concerning the founders:

Science became the lodestar for those who thought they were at the dawn of a new age; modern scientists, not ancient philosophers, guided them into the future.

Both modern scientists and ancient philosophers guided the founders, and it is precisely this fact that reveals so much about them. Isaac Newton's success in employing the scientific method, which employed both hypothesis and experimentation, had proved that reason and experience were partners in the quest for truth. To the founders, reason and tradition need not be opposed. The two were joined in the classical heritage, a tradition formed by rational men, whose wisdom had stood the test of time. How else can one account for the paradoxical fact that when the designers of the Great Seal of the United States proudly proclaimed the year 1776 the beginning of a "new order of the ages," they engraved the date in Roman numerals and inscribed the phrase in Latin, without the slightest sense of irony?<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to Peter Carr, June 22, 1792, 8.384; Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, October 7, 1814, 14.200; Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, April 21, 1803, 10.381–84; Jefferson to William Short, October 31, 1819, 15.220.

<sup>2</sup> Boyd et al., *Papers*, Jefferson to Peter Carr, August 10, 1787, 12.15; Cappon, *Letters*, Jefferson to John Adams, September 14, 1813, 2.374; May 3, 1816, 2.471; October 14, 1816, 2.492; Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to Benjamin Waterhouse, June 26, 1822, 15.385; Padover, *The Complete Jefferson*, 1104.

<sup>3</sup> Kimball, *Jefferson*, 115.

<sup>4</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism, Liberty, and Representative Government*, 7; Adams, *Extracts*, Jefferson to Charles Thomson, January 9, 1816, 365; Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to William Short, October 31, 1819, 15.219, 15.223–24.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Jefferson's Literary Commonplace Book*, 1.56–57; Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to Maria Cosway, October 12, 1786, 10.448. Jefferson received the doctrines of Epicurus from Lucretius, Diogenes Laertius, and Pierre Gassendi. For reference to the presence of Lucretius's *DRN* in Jefferson's library see MacKendrick, “This Rich Source of Delight,” 101. In an 1816 letter Jefferson praised the third-century Greek historian Diogenes Laertius, whose famous *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* included a discussion of the life and opinions of Epicurus, including fragments from his letters unavailable elsewhere. See Adams, *Extracts*, Jefferson to Francis Van der Kamp,

April 25, 1816, 369. In the same year Jefferson also praised Gassendi's *Syntagma Epicuri Philosophiae*, a seventeenth-century volume advancing a Christian version of Epicureanism. See Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to Charles Thomson, January 9, 1816, 15.33.

<sup>6</sup> Boyd, *Papers*, Jefferson to Robert Skipwith, August 3, 1771, 1.80; Jefferson to Peter Carr, August 19, 1785, 8.407; Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to William Short, October 31, 1819, 15.219–20.

<sup>7</sup> Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to Miles King, September 26, 1814, 14.197; Jefferson to John Adams, August 22, 1813, 13.349; Jefferson to Benjamin Waterhouse, June 26, 1822, 15.385; Peden, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 159; Cappon, *Letters*, Jefferson to John Adams, August 15, 1820, 2.569; April 8, 1816, 2.468; April 11, 1823, 2.592.

<sup>8</sup> Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, April 9, 1803, 10.374; Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, April 21, 1803, 10.383; Jefferson to John Brazier, August 24, 1819, 15.210; Jefferson to William Short, October 31, 1819, 15.220; Boyd, *Papers*, Jefferson to Robert Skipwith, August 3, 1771, 1.80; Cappon, *Letters*, Jefferson to John Adams, July 5, 1814, 2.433.

<sup>9</sup> Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, April 21, 1803, 10.384; Jefferson to William Short, August 4, 1820, 15.257; Jefferson to Benjamin Waterhouse, June 26, 1822, 15.385; Cappon, *Letters*, Jefferson to John Adams, April 11, 1823, 2.594.

<sup>10</sup> Cappon, *Letters*, Jefferson to John Adams, July 5, 1814, 2.432–33; Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, September 23, 1800, 10.175; Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, March 21, 1801, 10.228; Jefferson to William Canby, September 18, 1813, 13.378; Jefferson to Benjamin Waterhouse, June 26, 1822, 15.385.

<sup>11</sup> Boyd, *Papers*, A Bill for the Establishment of Religious Freedom, 1779, 2.545; Cappon, *Letters*, Jefferson to John Adams, April 11, 1823, 2.591; Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to Benjamin Waterhouse, June 26, 1822, 15.384–85.

<sup>12</sup> Cappon, *Letters*, Jefferson to John Adams, October 12, 1813, 2.385; August 15, 1820, 2.568–69; April 11, 1823, 2.594; Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to Augustus B. Woodward, March 24, 1824, 16.18; Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, April 21, 1803, 10.380.

<sup>13</sup> Cappon, *Letters*, Jefferson to John Adams, October 12, 1813, 2.384; Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to William Short, August 4, 1820, 15.257–60; October 31, 1819, 15.220.

<sup>14</sup> Boyd, *Papers*, Jefferson to Peter Carr, August 17, 1785, 8.407.

<sup>15</sup> Boyd, *Papers*, Jefferson to Maria Cosway, October 12, 1786, 10.449–51.

<sup>16</sup> Cappon, *Letters*, Jefferson to John Adams, April 11, 1823, 2.592.

<sup>17</sup> Boyd, *Papers*, Jefferson to Tench Coxe, June 1, 1795, 28.373; Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, September 23, 1800, 32.167. For just a couple of the many letters in which Jefferson promised to pray for the recipient and/or his nation see Jefferson to the Marquis de Lafayette, November 21, 1791, 22.313; Jefferson to the Executive Directory of the Batavian Republic, May 30, 1801, 34.209.

<sup>18</sup> Peden, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 163; Bergh and Lipscomb, *Writings*, Jefferson to Jean Nicholas Demeunier, January 24, 1786, 17.103.

<sup>19</sup> Adams, *Extracts*, 106–297.

<sup>20</sup> Lemisch, *Benjamin Franklin*, Franklin to Ezra Stiles, March 9, 1790, 337.

<sup>21</sup> Boyd, *Papers*, Jefferson to Maria Cosway, October 12, 1786, 10.451; Haraszti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress*, 302.

<sup>22</sup> Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*, 337; Rahe, *Republics, Ancient and Modern*, 336.

## CHAPTER 29

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# EPICUREANISM AND UTILITARIANISM<sup>1</sup>

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A. A. LONG

THE academic attention paid to Epicurus during the past hundred years has been in inverse ratio to his diffused influence on science and society in general. For scholars, Aristotle tends to dominate the field of ancient philosophy, followed by Plato and Stoicism, with Epicurus bringing up the rear. There has, of course, been extensive research on Epicurus and the Epicurean tradition, as this large volume amply attests. But, viewed in the context of the larger culture, there is little evidence that modern moral philosophers are turning to Epicurus, as they have been recently turning to Aristotle (from an interest in virtue ethics) or even to Stoicism (from an interest in natural law and the ethics of personhood). From 1800–1900 in Britain, by contrast, the ancient philosopher who dominated the field of ethics was Epicurus and what was taken to be Epicurean hedonism. Epicurus's presence in Victorian utilitarianism is the strongest mark of any ancient philosophy's afterlife in Britain during the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> And given the continuing vitality of utilitarianism since that time, Epicurus can still be regarded as the theory's hoariest forerunner.<sup>3</sup>

My theme in this chapter is the presence of Epicurus and Epicureanism in the hedonistic and utilitarian ethics of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), John Stuart Mill (1806–73), and Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900). I will preface this discussion with a few words about the preceding cultural context in Britain.

Traces of Epicurean social theory and moral psychology are evident in the writings of such major philosophers as Hobbes, Locke, and Hume.<sup>4</sup> Chiefly through Cicero's work *De finibus bonorum et malorum* Epicurus's ethical ideas reached many educated people in Britain, but these ideas were rarely acknowledged as Epicurean explicitly and positively. This reticence was due to the widespread belief that the hedonism and virtual atheism of Epicurean philosophy were inimical to piety, morality, and social well-being.<sup>5</sup> Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), one of the first thinkers to speak of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, was an important precursor of the Victorian utilitarians and also, by virtue of his hedonism, an implicit follower of Epicurus.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the eighteenth century, however, hedonism as the basis of ethics was being challenged by forms of rationalism and intuitionism, represented especially by the Scots philosopher Thomas Reid (1710–96).<sup>7</sup>

The general tenor of Reid's ethics can be seen in the following excerpt:

The happy man . . . is not he whose happiness is his only care, but he who, with perfect resignation, leaves the care of his happiness to him who made him, while he pursues with ardor the road of his duty . . . And as no man can be indifferent about his happiness, the good man has the consolation to know, that he consults his happiness most effectually when . . . he does his duty.<sup>8</sup>

Reid was particularly resistant to Hume's notion that moral distinctions are reducible to feelings of approval or disapproval, and subjective in essence, with reason having the purely instrumental role of serving the passions.<sup>9</sup> For Reid happiness and duty are equally "comprehended under the name of reason."<sup>10</sup> Yet, since conflict between these ends regularly arises, how could intuitionist ethics, as so construed, resolve inevitable clashes between them?

It was the ambition of utilitarianism, viewed in its theoretical context, to establish a set of purely secular principles that would firmly reconcile duty (right action), the common good, and individual happiness construed in

terms of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. Viewed practically, with its goal of generating the greatest happiness of the greatest number, utilitarianism underwrote the burgeoning interest in social policies and laws for general welfare, and it also activated egalitarian pressures for universal emancipation.

Both Mill and Sidgwick looked back to the pioneering work of Jeremy Bentham, as set out in his treatise: *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.<sup>11</sup> Bentham was not, or not primarily, an original philosopher. His historical importance is due primarily to his zeal and influence as a great legal and social reformer. Nevertheless, the aforementioned treatise, where Bentham starts from what he calls “the principle of utility,” set the tone for the ethical theory we have ever since called utilitarianism, glossed by Mill with the famous phrase “the greatest happiness principle.”<sup>12</sup> According to Mill, Bentham derived his social and ethical ideas from the French philosopher Claude Helvétius (1715–71). However, in the modern history of philosophy Bentham is regularly viewed as the founder of utilitarianism.<sup>13</sup>

It is not in Bentham’s manner to cite the names of other thinkers, but he was clearly familiar with the general thrust of Epicurean ethics and social theory. In the treatise mentioned above, he identifies “moralists” and “religionists” as united in hostility to:

The common enemy, the partisan of the principle of utility, whom they joined in branding with the odious name of Epicurean.<sup>14</sup>

This sentence concludes a passage in which Bentham draws a caustic contrast between his own “happiness augmenting” principle of utility and “the principle of asceticism.” He takes the advocates of the latter to be motivated either by “fear of future punishment at the hands of a splenetic and revengeful Deity,” or by “the hope of honor and reputation at the hands of men.” Bentham views each of his contrasting targets as equally opposed to hedonism. In this respect, as in his emphatic hostility to religious fear and competitive ambition for fame and status, Bentham echoes the authentic voice of Epicurus himself.

Both Mill and Sidgwick were fully conversant with Greek and Latin, and familiar with Cicero’s treatment of Epicureanism as mentioned above. It is not evident, or at least not known to me, whether they read any of the



surviving words of Epicurus himself. But their explicit references to Epicurus do engage with some of the specifics of his ethical theory. Mill sometimes criticizes Bentham, but Sidgwick sometimes defends Bentham against Mill, as we shall see.

Mill was a major public figure in Victorian Britain. Sidgwick, who served as Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge University from 1872 up to his death in 1900, was also well known beyond his immediate university circles. The work of his that I will generally refer to here from its first edition (1874), *The Methods of Ethics*, is one of the greatest British books of moral philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

Some thirty-five years ago I published a paper entitled “Pleasure and Social Utility: The Virtues of Being Epicurean.”<sup>16</sup> There I made a case, with brief reference to Bentham and Mill, for seeing Epicurus as the precursor of these utilitarians. The basis of my argument was not only the shared endorsement of hedonism and the removal of cultural impediments to happiness, but also the philanthropic and uncompetitive thrust of Epicurus’s social theory. In that earlier study I made no mention of Sidgwick, who is regularly acknowledged to be the most profound of the Victorian utilitarians. What I want to do here is to conduct a conversation, as it were, between Epicurus and these three British thinkers, with a view to asking where all four of them stand on the following three questions: (1) Are they separately or collectively to be viewed as psychological or as normative hedonists: i.e. do they hold that hedonism is the only possible basis for human motivation and for viable ethical theory, or instead, do they hold that it is the only sound basis or the best basis? (2) How do they construe the relation between active pleasure or agreeable sensation and absence of pain? (3) Do they provide a means of showing how Epicurus could coherently combine the egoistic foundations of his ethics with an interest in the general happiness?

## PSYCHOLOGICAL VS. NORMATIVE HEDONISM

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According to his own words Epicurus was a psychological hedonist:

We recognize pleasure as the good that is primary and congenital; from it we begin every choice and avoidance, and we come back to it, using the feeling (*pathos*) as the yardstick for

judging every good thing.<sup>17</sup>

For Epicurus human motivations are inevitably hedonistic. That naturalistic doctrine is confirmed as the school's position by Cicero's testimony, according to which all creatures from the moment of birth pursue pleasure and avoid pain "on the innocent and sound judgment of nature herself."<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, an Epicurean will think that persons who deny that pleasure is the only intrinsic good or the only intrinsic desirable, or who deny that "we" are ultimately motivated by desire for pleasure and desire to avoid pain, are simply deceiving themselves.<sup>19</sup> However, as a moral philosopher, Epicurus was also a normative hedonist.<sup>20</sup> This is because Epicurus thinks that when non-Epicureans pursue pleasure and seek to avoid pain (as they must do, by virtue of psychological hedonism), they fail to achieve the happiness they are seeking as a result of miscalculating the quantities of pleasure and pain obtainable from their actions. Epicurus thinks that only his recommended lifestyle (with its ban on fulfilling "empty" desires) can consistently activate the pleasure sources he deems essential to long-term happiness and avoid the pains he deems inimical to this ideal.<sup>21</sup>

Many details of Epicurus's account of pleasure are controversial, but for my present purpose I will simply assume that he regarded all pleasures, whether sensory or mental, whether active (*kinetic*) or static (*katastematic*), whether stimulated by the senses or consisting simply in freedom from pain, as agreeable states of consciousness, enjoyable experiences, immediate feelings or sensations. Consistently with his psychological hedonism, Epicurus thinks that any pleasure as such is good and any pain as such is bad, but, as an ethical theorist, he also thinks that pleasures vary in their probable contribution to his long-term goal of tranquility or complete absence of pain, so that it will often be rational to accept a present pain in the interests of achieving a greater forthcoming pleasure.<sup>22</sup> His official measure of value for pleasures and pains seems to be entirely quantitative with quantity construed in terms of duration, persistence, and uniformity.

Where do the early utilitarians stand on the issue of psychological and normative hedonism? The case of Bentham is the simplest. Here are the ringing sentences with which he opens his treatise: *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure* [Bentham's italics]. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while. The *principle of utility* recognizes this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reasons and of law. Systems which attempt to question it, deal in sounds instead of sense, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light.<sup>23</sup>

From what Bentham says elsewhere, we can infer that he was an unqualified psychological hedonist, as exemplified by his notorious observation that:

Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry.<sup>24</sup>

On this view, Bentham was not disposed to specify general rules for discriminating between pleasure sources, as Epicurus had done with his distinction between necessary, natural, and empty (or vain) desires. In a context criticizing Bentham's psychological hedonism, Sidgwick carefully distinguishes that notion from the position he himself calls Egoistic Hedonism.<sup>25</sup> The basis for Sidgwick's distinction is that an Egoistic Hedonist, unlike a psychological hedonist, is not necessarily committed to the view that everyone always acts on the basis of what they happen to think will maximize their pleasures or minimize their pains. An egoistic hedonist, in Sidgwick's terms, holds not that his is the only ethical theory, but rather that it is the best theory. In Sidgwick's terms (though he does not say so explicitly) Epicurus starts from a position of psychological hedonism; but in light of his fully developed ethics he ought rather to be called an egoistic hedonist because of the importance he assigns to reason in discriminating between desires, as I have already remarked concerning Epicurus's normative hedonism.

Bentham calls pleasures and pains in general "interesting perceptions,"<sup>26</sup> and he regularly substitutes the word happiness or utility for pleasure. This practice is in line with English usage where happiness is frequently used equivalently to pleasure. By contrast, while most ancient theories of ethics were eudemonist in making the agent's happiness (*eudaimonia*) their end, it

was only the Epicureans who identified happiness with the maximum of pleasure and the absence of pain.

Bentham's criterion for distinguishing between pleasures is entirely quantitative. From a philosophical perspective, one would like him to have been more rigorous than he was in defending his statement that "immunity from pain comes to the same thing" as pleasure.<sup>27</sup> But Bentham's principal objective was not to justify hedonism, but to develop his brand of its universalist utilitarian implications.

Sidgwick aligns Epicurus with Bentham in the following comment, which once again emphasizes Bentham's psychological hedonism:

Though ethically Epicureanism and Benthamism may be viewed as standing in polar opposition [i.e., because the former is egoistic and the latter universalistic] psychologically Bentham is in fundamental agreement with Epicureans. He holds that a man ought to aim at the maximum felicity of men in general; but he holds, also, that he always does aim at what appears to him his own maximum felicity—that he cannot help doing this—that this is the way his volition inevitably acts.<sup>28</sup>

Notwithstanding this passage, Sidgwick, in his more considered view, takes Epicurus to have practiced the ethical method he himself calls egoism, or more fully egoistic hedonism, meaning: the system that fixes as the reasonable ultimate end of each individual's action his own greatest happiness: i.e., a life so arranged that the excess in it of pleasurable over painful consciousness shall be the greatest possible.<sup>29</sup> Hence, Sidgwick writes:

It may sometimes be convenient to call it (i.e., egoistic hedonism) Epicureanism: for though this name more properly denotes a particular historical system it has come to be commonly used in the wider sense in which I wish to employ it.<sup>30</sup>

Where does Mill stand on the question of psychological versus normative hedonism? Mill begins his account by aligning Epicurus with Bentham:

Those who know anything about the matter [i.e., the relation of utility to pleasure, as proposed by utilitarian philosophers] are aware that every writer, from Epicurus to Bentham, who maintained the theory of utility, meant by it, not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure, but pleasure itself, together with exemption from pain; and instead of opposing the useful to the agreeable or the ornamental, have always declared that the useful means these, among other things.<sup>31</sup>

Mill then proceeds as follows:

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. *By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness pain, and the privation of pleasure* [my italics here and later]. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life on which this theory of morality is grounded—namely, that pleasure, and freedom from pain, *are the only things desirable as ends*; and that all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable *either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain*. . . . The ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people) is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality.<sup>32</sup>

Here, in introducing utilitarianism, Mill says categorically that pleasure and freedom from pain are the only inherent desirables. Later he amplifies his position in the following words:

Desiring a thing and finding it pleasant, aversion to it and thinking of it as painful, are phenomena entirely inseparable, or rather two parts of the same phenomenon; in strictness of language, two different modes of naming the same psychological fact: that to think of an object as desirable (unless for the sake of its consequences), and to think of it as pleasant are one and the same thing; and that to desire anything, except in proportion as the idea of it is pleasant, is a physical and metaphysical impossibility.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, like Bentham, Mill presents himself as an unqualified psychological hedonist. Sidgwick took him severely to task, observing:

It is a matter of common experience that the resultant or prevailing desire in men is often directed towards what (even in the moment of yielding to the desire) they think likely to cause more pain than pleasure on the whole. “Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor” [I see and approve of what is better but I follow what is worse] is as applicable to the Epicurean as it is to anyone else.<sup>34</sup>

In the penultimate citation, Mill does not distinguish between the hedonistic happiness of individuals and that of society at large, but immediately before that, he had written:

The [utilitarian] standard is not the agent’s own greatest happiness but the greatest amount of happiness altogether.<sup>35</sup>

and later:

The sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people do actually desire it. If the end which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself were not, in theory and in practice acknowledged to be an end, nothing could convince any person that it was so. No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness. This, however, being a fact, we have not only all the proof which the case admits of, but all which it is possible to require, that happiness is a good: that each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore a good to the aggregate of all persons. Happiness has made out its title as *one* [Mill's italics] of the ends of conduct, and consequently one of the criteria of morality.<sup>36</sup>

Many commentators since Sidgwick have observed how Mill slides from the inevitable egoistic motivations posited by Epicurus and Bentham, with their psychological hedonism, to his own utilitarian or altruistic postulate concerning the desirability of the general happiness.<sup>37</sup> As Sidgwick himself trenchantly stated:

[Mill has] tried to establish a logical connexion between the psychological and ethical principles, which he holds in common with Bentham, and to convince his readers that because each man naturally seeks his own happiness, therefore he ought to seek the happiness of other people.<sup>38</sup>

Mill seems to start out as a psychological hedonist, but he transitions without clear indication not only to universalistic hedonism, but even considers that to be only *one* of the possible ends of conduct.<sup>39</sup>

Mill's confusions in this regard are compounded by his asserting rather than proving that "higher pleasures" (as assessed by those who are "competent judges") are intrinsically superior to sensual ones, and that the pleasures most germane to his utilitarianism can be distinguished in terms of quality rather than quantity. At this point he defends the Epicureans from the charge of commending a beast's pleasures:

There is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation. . . . It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.<sup>40</sup>

Actually Mill is incorrect to attribute to Epicurus a distinction between higher and lower pleasures. Epicurus takes mental pleasures and pains to be

greater than bodily pleasures and pains, but not intrinsically or ethically better or worse respectively: the greater magnitude of the former is due to the fact that bodily pleasures and pains are limited in time to the duration of the things that cause them, whereas mental pleasures and corresponding pains are greater because they extend beyond the present by reason of recollection and anticipation.<sup>41</sup>

On the basis of what I have said so far, it should be evident that Epicurus was more rigorous than Mill in advancing the claims of his own version of hedonism. If Mill had read Epicurus himself, rather than Cicero, he would hardly have made the following negative comment in his book *Utilitarianism*:

To refer, for instance, to the Epicurean philosophy, according to the most complete view we have of the moral part of it, by the most accomplished scholar of antiquity, Cicero; we ask anyone who has read his philosophical writings, the “De finibus” for instance, whether the arguments of the Epicureans do not, just as much as those of the Stoics or Platonists, consist of mere rhetorical appeals to common notions, to *εἰκότα* and *σημεία* instead of *τεκμήρια*, notions picked up as it were casually, and when true at all, never so narrowly looked into as to ascertain in what sense and under what limitations they are true. The application of a real inductive philosophy to the problems of ethics, is as unknown to the Epicurean moralists as to any of the other schools; they never take a question to pieces, and join issue on a definite point. Bentham certainly did not learn his sifting and anatomizing method from them.<sup>42</sup>

I will return to Mill at the end of this study, but for now I pass on to Sidgwick. The main part of Sidgwick’s massive work on ethics is an analysis and evaluation of three ethical methods: Egoism (which I have already discussed), Intuitionism (the supposedly self-evident rightness of moral principles, irrespective of their consequences), and Universalistic Hedonism or Utilitarianism.<sup>43</sup> As construed by Sidgwick, an ethical method seeks to obtain:

reasoned convictions as to what ought to be done which are found—either explicit or implicit—in the moral consciousness of mankind generally: and which, from time to time, have been developed, either singly or in combination, by individual thinkers, and worked up into the systems now historical.<sup>44</sup>

Sidgwick thinks that Common Sense finds some plausibility in all three methods, but the one he ultimately plumps for himself is utilitarianism, the method most akin to Common Sense, which he even calls “unconscious



Utilitarianism.” He follows Bentham in characterizing this theory as stating that:

the conduct which, under any given circumstances, is externally or objectively right, is that which will produce the greatest amount of happiness to all whose interests are affected ... by Greatest Happiness is meant the greatest possible surplus of pleasure over pain, the pain being conceived as balanced against an equal amount of pleasure, so that the two mutually annihilate each other for purpose of ethical calculation.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike Bentham and Mill, Sidgwick completely rejects psychological hedonism, on the plausible grounds that human beings are not exclusively motivated by a desire for “agreeable sensations,”<sup>46</sup> and may love virtue for its own sake. At the same time, however, he writes:

A man’s predominant desire is, I think, most commonly not a conscious impulse towards pleasure; but where there is a strong desire in any direction, there is commonly keen susceptibility to the corresponding pleasures.<sup>47</sup>

When it comes to justifying utilitarianism against intuitionism, Sidgwick emphasizes the appeal of hedonism. One of its most attractive features for him is its making good (pleasure) and bad (pain) commensurable, and therefore, in principle, calculable. He was well aware that a hedonistic calculus could generally be no more than approximate, but it did hold, so he thought, a greater prospect of rational judgment than mere intuition, and was thus the best, albeit fallible, guide for identifying the individual’s greatest happiness. He granted that human beings have a primary interest in their own happiness which, as he puts it, “Has a legitimate authority over all particular appetites and passions, which as reasonable beings we are bound to recognize.”<sup>48</sup> This principle accords with Common Sense, but Common Sense does not recognize the utilitarian obligation to take the happiness of others as an ultimate end. How can this obligation be shown?

Sidgwick acknowledged that nothing can directly turn an egoistic hedonist into a utilitarian if the egoist simply maintains that he ought to make his own happiness or pleasure his ultimate end. In order to prove the validity of universalistic hedonism or utilitarianism, we need the egoist to maintain that his happiness or pleasure is “objectively good.” In that case:

We can then point out to him that *his* [Sidgwick’s italics] happiness cannot be more objectively desirable or more a good than the similar happiness of any other person: the

mere fact (if I may so put it) that *he is he* can have nothing to do with its objective desirability or goodness. Hence, starting with his own principle, he must accept the wider notion of Universal happiness or pleasure as representing the real end of Reason, the absolutely Good or Desirable: as the end to which the action of a reasonable agent as such ought to be directed.<sup>49</sup>

In light of Sidgwick's trenchant criticism of Mill's slide from egoistic hedonism to utilitarianism, this proof is surprisingly weak. Sidgwick revised his formulation of it in later editions of his work, but in the end he found himself forced to acknowledge the logical priority of one's own good to the general good and to admit his inability to present the determined egoist with a sufficient reason to accept the utilitarian principle "unless egoism and utilitarianism can be shown to coincide."<sup>50</sup> Bentham had proposed that the bridge between the individual's pleasure and his acting for the common good can be found in feelings of sympathy and antipathy, backed up by external sanctions. Unlike Bentham or Mill, Sidgwick emphasizes "the obvious and glaring difference between the propositions that each ought to seek his own happiness, and that each ought to seek the happiness of all."<sup>51</sup> In spite of his official endorsement of utilitarianism, Sidgwick finally concludes that neither argument nor external sanctions can convince a rational egoist to prefer the common good to his own.<sup>52</sup> He nowhere suggests, as far as I can see, that the happiness or pleasure of all, or at least that of one's immediate associates, might have a constitutive relation to the happiness or pleasure of the individual. By contrast, Epicurus's doctrine that friendships can become desirable for their own sake looks a promising move, provided it can be made consistent with his egoistic starting point. I will take up this point at the conclusion of the paper. For now I pass to my second main question.

## THE RELATION BETWEEN PLEASURE AND ABSENCE OF PAIN

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Both Bentham and Mill, as we have seen, include absence of pain, as well as pleasure, among the only things desirable as ends. Neither of them seems to have asked whether absence of pain is itself a pleasure, or instead, an entirely neutral condition of neither pleasure nor pain. Epicurus, of course,

denied that there is such a neutral condition. According to his doctrine, pain and pleasure are simply mutually exclusive. On this view these experiences are contradictories, not contraries, and so the removal of all pain constitutes the maximum of pleasure.<sup>53</sup> Precisely what Epicurus meant by this latter claim is controversial. I will simply say here that it cannot mean, in my opinion, that absence of pain entails absence of agreeable feeling or affect. On the contrary, I think Epicurus must mean that when, in waking states, we have no painful sensations, no anxieties, and no unfulfilled desires, our condition is, precisely for those reasons, supremely agreeable and enjoyable, and hence the very essence of complete pleasure.<sup>54</sup>

Sidgwick discusses Epicurus's doctrine in his chapter entitled "Empirical Hedonism." His context is the commensurability of pleasures and pains:

Pain must be reckoned as the negative quantity of pleasure, to be balanced against and subtracted from the positive: there must therefore be a point of transition in consciousness at which we pass from the positive to the negative. That is, this strictly indifferent or neutral consciousness is at least ideally possible. It is not absolutely necessary to assume that such a state ever actually occurs. Still experience seems to shew that a state very nearly approximating to this is common: and we certainly experience continual transitions from pleasure to pain and *vice versa* and thus (unless we conceive all such transitions to be abrupt) we must exist at least momentarily in this neutral state.<sup>55</sup>

Sidgwick assumes that the measurement of pleasures "involves the assumption of a hedonistic zero . . . as a point from which pleasures may be measured." What does he mean? Let us assign the values +1, +2, and +4 to three different pleasures. And let us assign the values -1, -2, and -4 to three corresponding pains. Since +1-1, or +2-2 or +4-4 all equal zero and are therefore commensurable, Sidgwick seems to assume that such values can only be computed accordingly by presuming a hedonistic zero. But if, as he allows to be possible, we never actually experience hedonistic zero, there is no need to think that in passing from +1 to -1, or -1 to +1, there is a non-experienced 0 through which we pass from one state to the other. When a pain disrupts a pleasure, or *vice versa*, the transition is typically abrupt or instantaneous and does not transition even momentarily through a neutral state.

Actually Epicurus would do the arithmetic differently. Suppose we assign the units +1, +2, and +4 to three pleasures of the same type (say drinking when thirsty, and thus in corresponding need/or in pain), and let +4

be the maximum pleasure, which must then equal complete absence of pain (when thirst is entirely quenched). It follows for Epicurus, then, that pleasure +1 is accompanied by 3 units of pain, and pleasure +2 is accompanied by 2 units of pain, and pleasure +4 is accompanied by 0 units of pain. In this way too we achieve commensurability of pleasures and pains, but without passing through zero, or a neutral intermediate condition. After positing his hedonistic zero, Sidgwick continues:

Here we may notice the paradox of Epicurus,<sup>56</sup> that painlessness is equivalent to the highest possible pleasure: so that if we can attain absolute freedom from pain, the goal of Hedonism is reached: after that we may vary, but cannot increase our pleasure. The paradox was probably due in some measure to an unavowed desire in the mind of Epicurus to mitigate the sharp provocation which unmixed Hedonism naturally gives to the moral sense of mankind. It is, however, merely the exaggeration of a truth that it is important to notice: namely, that this neutral feeling—hedonistic zero, as I have called it—is not (as might vaguely be thought) the normal condition of our consciousness, out of which we occasionally sink into pain, and occasionally rise into pleasure. Nature has not been so niggardly to man as this: so long as health is retained, and pain and irksome toil banished, the mere sense of living, the mere performance of the ordinary habitual functions of life, is itself a pleasure of a certain degree.<sup>57</sup>

We do not need to follow Sidgwick in thinking that Epicurus had scruples about advancing “unmixed Hedonism.” What is interesting are two points. First, Sidgwick’s correct observation concerning Epicurus’s doctrine that, once complete absence of pain is reached, pleasure can be varied but not increased, and second, his virtual defense of Epicurus’s denial of a neutral condition between pleasure and pain for reasons that Epicurus actually did endorse—the sheer pleasure of living with good health and without toil or anxiety.

I turn finally to my third question.

## EGOISTIC HEDONISM AND THE GENERAL HAPPINESS

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Bentham’s move from psychological hedonism to utilitarianism, apart from appeals to sympathy and legal sanctions, is a postulate rather than a proof. Because Bentham takes the only intrinsic good to be happiness construed as pleasure and absence of pain, the more of such good the better, or in the

dictum Mill attributed to Bentham: “Everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one,” a principle that Sidgwick finds “the simplest, and the only one which does not need a special justification.”<sup>58</sup>

Sidgwick, as we have seen, is scrupulously frank in conceding that egoistic motivations, taken by themselves, can be just as rational as altruistic ones. Both Bentham and Sidgwick, in my judgment, hold consistently to their view that the utilitarian can never banish self-interest, construed hedonistically, from consciousness or motivation, and therefore, in spite of the preferential status of the general good there can be no assurance that the happiness of individuals will actually coincide with the happiness of the greatest number. As we have seen, Sidgwick criticized Mill for the latter’s view that there is a conceptual tie between the individual’s desire for his own well-being and the desirability of the general happiness.

Sidgwick’s criticism is cogent, and needs no further comment here. What I want to do now is to compare some of Mill’s other ideas with those of Epicurus, and then conclude with an assessment of how well Epicurus measures up alongside the Victorian utilitarians.

The Epicurean propositions to be compared are the following:

- (1) The virtues are desirable solely as means to happiness, but not as ends in themselves (Diogenes of Oenoanda 26.1.2–3.8; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 21P).
- (2) The virtues are naturally linked with living pleasurably, and living pleasurably is inseparable from them (Epicurus, *Ep. Men.* 132; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 21B6).
- (3) Friendship is per se desirable, but it originates from utility (SV 23; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 22F1).<sup>59</sup>
- (4) Friendship is an immortal good (SV 78; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 22F7).

Propositions 1 and 2 have been thought to be inconsistent, but that need not be so. In fact all we need do to make them explicitly consistent is to add “necessary” or “natural” before “means to happiness” in proposition 1. That the virtues are the necessary or natural means for living pleasurably makes the virtues no more intrinsically desirable than saying that an adequate provision of subsistence and security is such. The focus of proposition 2 is

on the inter-entailment between virtue and living (i.e. organizing one's life) pleurably; it does not imply that pleasures as such, meaning every agreeable feeling or mental state, have anything to do with virtue. Propositions 3 and 4 commit Epicurus to supposing that friendship as such is *a* pleasure, but that proposition seems to me entirely consistent with his hedonism provided we take it to mean that friendship is intrinsically pleasurable or gratifying, rather than being only instrumentally desirable.

However, the point I want to focus on here is the notion that friendship comes to be upgraded from being desirable for its utility or consequences (construed as means of assistance and security) to becoming a pleasure as such.<sup>60</sup>

Let us now review two of Mill's ideas:

[The utilitarian doctrine] maintains not only that virtue is to be desired, but that it is to be desired disinterestedly, for itself... Virtue, according to the utilitarian doctrine, is not naturally and originally part of the end, but it is capable of becoming so; and in those who love it disinterestedly it has become so, and is desired and cherished, not as a means to happiness, but as a part of their happiness.<sup>61</sup>

And now:

There was no original desire of it [virtue], or motive to it, save its conduciveness to pleasure, and especially its protection from pain. But through the association thus formed, it may be felt a good in itself, and desired as such with as great intensity as any other good. . . . Those who desire virtue for its own sake, desire it either because the consciousness of it is a pleasure, or because the consciousness of being without it is a pain, or for both reasons united.<sup>62</sup>

Mill's notion that virtue can become a part of the end, though not being such originally, clearly recalls Epicurus's third proposition (as cited above) concerning friendship. To make Epicurus consistent, I had to propose that upgraded friendship signifies not precisely a particular human relationship, taken to be desirable just for its own sake, but the pleasurable sentiments that such a relationship brings about in the befriending agent. To desire friendship for its own sake will then mean desiring it, not as a means to pleasure, but as being itself a pleasure.<sup>63</sup>

That seems to be similar to Mill's move in the last quotation where he associates pleasurable consciousness with virtue. But, as Mill's critics were ready to point out, desiring virtue because it generates pleasurable

consciousness does not fit his claims in the earlier passage about the desire for virtue becoming disinterested or desired for its own sake. I think Epicurus's move is hedonistically coherent whereas Mill's move is not. We do take pleasure in our friends, and we may find friendship, as Epicurus says (*KD* 27; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 22E1), the greatest of life's blessings. That is a far cry from Mill's notion that virtue as such [justice and another's good] can form the content of pleasure, as it must do if Mill is to be consistent on the hedonistic foundation of utilitarianism.

## CONCLUSION

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Epicurean hedonism measures up quite well for consistency and ethical interest, when compared with the work of Bentham, Mill, and Sidgwick. How is it with Epicurean utilitarianism? The expression, and hence the question, may seem inappropriate on the grounds that, unlike the Victorians, Epicurus did not specify the general happiness as the ethical goal that his followers should seek to promote. Like all mainstream ancient philosophers, one may go on to observe, Epicurus was a eudemonist who took it as his task to propose a rational and naturalistic foundation for the happiness of individuals as individuals. The good of others, one may continue, is never the starting point or prime desideratum of ancient ethics, but emerges, when and where it does emerge, as something derived from the social implications of the conditions necessary for the individual's happiness and the role assigned to virtue and friendship.

These observations concerning ancient ethics are sound enough. But I strongly resist the notion that their soundness is a sufficient reason to detach Epicurus's ethical outlook from a form of utilitarianism that has some clear affinities to its modern founders.

As I noted earlier (n. 3 above), Geoffrey Scarre recognizes Epicurus, without special pleading, as a forerunner of nineteenth-century utilitarianism. Here is how he states the point:

Common to both is a distinctive habit of mind and outlook on life that is anti-mystical, empirical, unpuritanical, and informed by a sense that human existence is to be justified



internally, by the richness of its constituent experiences, and not externally by its relation to God, or the cosmos, or some transcendental purpose.<sup>64</sup>

This is well said. Scarre continues his account of the common ground by mentioning the “consequentialist line on the standard of right and wrong,” the “denial of intrinsic value to the virtues,” and the “pleasure-centered theories of value.” There is, however, according to Scarre, a profound difference between Epicurean ethics and that of his utilitarian successors, to Epicurus’s detriment. This is the latter’s “placing the pursuit of personal *ataraxia* centre-stage in one’s life” making it “difficult to sustain a lively concern for the interests of other people.”<sup>65</sup> Scarre fully acknowledges Epicurus’s “warm regard for friendship,” but, notwithstanding, he calls “the Epicurean disengagement from public affairs profoundly immoral from the utilitarian point of view” and “an appalling self-absorbedness.”<sup>66</sup>

Such charges have been brought against Epicureanism ever since the foundation of the Garden. Yet, apart from Epicurus’s extraordinarily liberating attack on superstition, irrational fears, and aggressive self-aggrandizement, everything we know about the actual conduct of the founder and his followers, and thus the application and scope of his influence, speaks volumes against both the “moral solipsism” that troubles Scarre and the alleged lack of interest on the part of Epicureans in the general well-being. Were such charges well grounded, we could make no sense of Epicurus’s educational mission and celebrated philanthropy, Lucretius’s masterly epic with its eulogy of the school’s founder as the savior of mankind, Seneca’s frequent citations of Epicurean maxims, addressed to “everyone,” as he says (*Ep.* 14.18), the great Epicurean inscription erected by Diogenes of Oenoanda, for the benefit of his fellow citizens, and much more.<sup>67</sup> Today, when organized politics throughout the world are so often marred by corruption and special interests, we should be in a better position to see that public service can be very effectively, if not more effectively, conducted through an exemplary private life, of teaching or publishing (as it was, in the lives of Mill and Sidgwick). As these figures recognized, Epicurus starts out, as they do, from a position of self-interested hedonism. In light of the conceptual connections he establishes between pleasure and friendship, Epicurus ends up as a virtual utilitarian like themselves because, without friends and without promoting the happiness of friends (many of whom will be fellow citizens), we cannot maximize

happiness. Indeed, Mill himself issued the following caveat concerning utilitarianism and the greatest happiness principle:

It is a misapprehension of the utilitarian mode of thought, to conceive it as implying that people should fix their minds upon so wide a generality as the world, or society at large. The great majority of good actions are intended not for the benefit of the world, but for that of individuals, of which the good of the world is made up; and the thoughts of the most virtuous person need not on these occasions travel beyond the particular persons concerned, except, so far as is necessary to assure himself that in benefiting them he is not violating the rights, that is, the legitimate expectations of anyone else. The multiplication of happiness is, according to the utilitarian ethics, the object of virtue; the occasions on which any person (except one in a thousand) has it in his power to do this on an extended scale, in other words, to be a public benefactor, are but exceptional.<sup>68</sup>

I can think of few greater multipliers of happiness, taking the long view of history, than Epicurus himself.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is a much expanded version of the paper I contributed to *Philosophie der Lust. Studien zum Hedonismus*, “Bentham, Mill and Sidgwick on Epicurean Hedonism.” I am grateful to Schwabe Verlag for allowing me to reprint the gist of that paper here, and to the editors of the Schwabe volume for inviting me to participate in their third international colloquium on Epicurus and the Epicurean tradition, which took place at the University of Würzburg in April 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Nor should we forget Karl Marx’s accolade to Epicurus in his doctoral dissertation. See Marx, “Draft of New Preface to Doctoral Dissertation”: “Philosophy, as long as a drop of blood shall pulse in its world-subduing and absolutely free heart, will never grow tired of answering its adversaries with the cry of Epicurus: ‘Not the man who denies the gods worshipped by the multitude, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes about them, is truly impious’” [= *Ep. Men.* 123]. During the Soviet era, Epicureanism was the ancient philosophy chiefly studied in Russia and East European universities.

<sup>3</sup> See Scarre, “Epicurus as a Forerunner of Utilitarianism,” 219: “On Mill’s reading of history, utilitarianism and Epicureanism were in essential respects the same.” Scarre, *Utilitarianism*, 40 restates this position in his general study of utilitarianism: “On Mill’s reading of history, Benthamite utilitarianism and Epicureanism were essentially identical in their theory of value.”

<sup>4</sup> See Wilson, “Epicureanism in Early Modern Philosophy,” 276–80.

<sup>5</sup> Even today in the United States Epicurus continues to be demonized by adherents of the Intelligent Design movement, along with Darwin, Marx, and Freud: see Foster, Clark, and York,

*Critique of Intelligent Design*, 27–30.

<sup>6</sup> See Hruschka, “The Greatest Happiness Principle”; Scarre, *Utilitarianism*, 55; and Dorsey, “Hutcheson’s Deceptive Hedonism.”

<sup>7</sup> See Haakonssen and Harris’s introduction to Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, on Reid’s “polemics against Epicureanism, both ancient and modern,” xv, where they observe that “Reid saw contemporary moral sensationalism, associationism and necessitarianism as the direct extensions of ancient Epicureanism and its revival in the seventeenth century.” On Reid’s philosophy in general, see Schneewind, *Sidgwick’s Ethics*, 63–74.

<sup>8</sup> Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 168.

<sup>9</sup> Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 157.

<sup>10</sup> Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 154.

<sup>11</sup> First printed in 1780 but not published before 1789: see the edition of Burns and Hart, *An Introduction to the Principles*, xxxvii–xxxix. I cite Bentham’s work by page numbers from this edition.

<sup>12</sup> For Bentham’s coinage of the term utilitarianism, see Scarre, *Utilitarianism*, 3–4.

<sup>13</sup> See Mill, *Bentham*, 90. I cite Mill by page numbers of Warnock’s edition. For Helvétius’s role in the history of utilitarianism, see Scarre, *Utilitarianism*, 50–53.

<sup>14</sup> Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Sidgwick revised the work repeatedly throughout his later life; its latest edition (the seventh) appeared posthumously in 1907. I draw largely on the first edition because it contains more explicit references to Epicurus than do the later editions.

<sup>16</sup> Long, “Pleasure and Social Utility.” Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory* also compares Epicurus with Mill. Scarre, *Utilitarianism*, 39–47, without reference to Mitsis or myself, finds “the best utilitarian theories an improvement upon Epicureanism because they preserve its virtues but avoid its key defect” (46), which Scarre identifies with “self-absorbedness” as distinct from “an impulse to promote the general good.” I return to Scarre’s criticism at the end of this study.

<sup>17</sup> Epicurus: *Ep. Men.* 129, trans. Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 21B.

<sup>18</sup> Cicero *Fin.* 1.30: Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 20A. See Brunschwig, “The Cradle Argument,” 115–22.

<sup>19</sup> Cooper, “Pleasure and Desire in Epicurus” argues that the “we” in Epicurus’s quoted text pertains only to “us Epicureans” rather than human beings as such. I share the majority view that Epicurus was a psychological hedonist: see Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 62–63; Erler, “Epicurean Ethics,” 649; Woolf, “What Kind of Hedonist Was Epicurus?”; and Tsouna in this volume.

<sup>20</sup> As Cooper, “Pleasure and Desire in Epicurus” (see n. 19) proposes.

<sup>21</sup> *Ep. Men.* 127; *KD* 18, 25, 30 (Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 21E). Cf. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 3: “No one maintains that the actions of all men are such as a scientific Hedonist would approve. Even in the view of Pure Epicureanism, action aimed at the true end, directed towards the attainment of that which is truly good, is an ideal to which actual human conduct only approximates.”

<sup>22</sup> *Ep. Men.* 129–32.

<sup>23</sup> Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 11. The affinity to Helvétius is striking, where Helvétius, *Treatise on Man*, 146, writing of pleasure and pain, says: “These two are, and always will be, the only principles of action in man.”

<sup>24</sup> Bentham, *The Rationale of Reward*, 206.

<sup>25</sup> I cite Sidgwick here from the seventh edition (1907) of *The Methods of Ethics* (41–42): “There is no necessary connexion between the psychological proposition that pleasure or absence of pain to myself is always the actual ultimate end of my action, and the ethical proposition that my own

greatest happiness or pleasure is for me the *right* ultimate end. . . . A psychological law invariably realized in my conduct does not admit of being conceived as ‘a precept’ or ‘dictate of reason’ . . . . Egoistic Hedonism becomes a possible ethical ideal to which psychological hedonism seems to point.”

<sup>26</sup> Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles*, 42.

<sup>27</sup> Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles*, 34.

<sup>28</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 67.

<sup>29</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 109.

<sup>30</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 256.

<sup>32</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 257, 262.

<sup>33</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 293.

<sup>34</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 31. Sidgwick, without acknowledgment, cites Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.20, which is Ovid’s Latin adaptation of Euripides *Medea* 1078–79.

<sup>35</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 262.

<sup>36</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 288.

<sup>37</sup> See especially Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 64–72.

<sup>38</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 68. See also Sidgwick, *A Supplement to the Second Edition of the Methods of Ethics*, 151–52.

<sup>39</sup> Sidgwick exonerates Bentham from the confusion he attributes to Mill, observing (68): “If he [Bentham] is asked . . . ‘When you concern yourself about the public good and call it the right and proper end of action, do not you recognize a principle of duty, obedience to which you prefer to your own pleasure?’ he answers unhesitatingly, ‘No, I concern myself about the public good *because in me selfishness has taken the form of public spirit* [Sidgwick’s italics], and when I call it the proper end, I mean that I wish all other men to take it for such, with a view to its attainment, with which the attainment of my own greatest happiness is bound up.”

<sup>40</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 258–60.

<sup>41</sup> See Epicurus: *KD* 3, 4, 18; Diogenes of Oenoanda 38.1.8–38.3.14 (Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 21C, E, V). Once complete freedom from pain is attained, the ancient Epicurean’s pleasures can vary but not increase.

<sup>42</sup> Mill on Bentham in *Utilitarianism*, 90. Mill’s essay on Bentham was first published in *London and Westminster Review*, August 1838.

<sup>43</sup> Schneewind, *Sidgwick’s Ethics* is a comprehensive study of Sidgwick. For a more recent account see Irwin, *Development of Ethics*, chh. 8–13.

<sup>44</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics* (Preface to the First Edition, v.).

<sup>45</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 381 and 384.

<sup>46</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 41.

<sup>47</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 40.

<sup>48</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 389.

<sup>49</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 391.

<sup>50</sup> See Schneewind, *Sidgwick’s Ethics*, 370.

<sup>51</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 382.

<sup>52</sup> See Rogers, *Self-Interest*, 174 in discussion of Sidgwick: “It is both rational for an individual to pursue the universal good and rational for him to hold his own happiness as an end which he will not sacrifice to any other.”

<sup>53</sup> For the evidence and discussion, see Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, ch. 21.

<sup>54</sup> See Woolf, "Pleasure and Desire," 173–74: "What is valuable about the state of freedom from pain and distress that the conscious Epicurean subject is in is that it is experienced as having a positive character . . . a relaxed freshness, let us say, that feels wonderful."

<sup>55</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 113.

<sup>56</sup> Sidgwick refers to Cic. *Fin.* Book 1.

<sup>57</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 113.

<sup>58</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 387. See Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 319.

<sup>59</sup> "Desirable" is an emendation of the MSS reading "virtue," which I have defended in the past: see Long, "Pleasure and Social Utility," reprint, 192. For my argument in this study, it is not necessary to prefer one word to the other.

<sup>60</sup> I sidestep debates about the criteria for desiring friendship that Cicero attributes to later Epicureans, Cic. *Fin.* 1.65–70, on which see Mitsis in this volume.

<sup>61</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 289–90.

<sup>62</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 291–92.

<sup>63</sup> So I have already argued in Long, "Pleasure and Social Utility," 192.

<sup>64</sup> Scarre, "Epicurus as a Forerunner of Utilitarianism," 225.

<sup>65</sup> Scarre, "Epicurus as a Forerunner of Utilitarianism," 228.

<sup>66</sup> Scarre, "Epicurus as a Forerunner of Utilitarianism," 230.

<sup>67</sup> For further rebuttal of such charges as those made by Scarre, see Long, "Pleasure and Social Utility," and also Lucian's account of Epicurean resistance to persecution in his work *Alexander*, which treats the career of a fraudulent magician and religious rabble rouser.

<sup>68</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 270.

## CHAPTER 30

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# EPICURUS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY

*Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche*

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JAMES I. PORTER

THE attention that Epicurus received among German Romantic philosophers from Kant to Nietzsche is remarkable. This is partly to be explained by the French Revolution, which elevated ancient atomism to a new level of prominence. The worldly materialism of this ancient doctrine, and its amenability to atheism, secularism, science, humanist ethics, and communal values, were obvious attractions. But the ground had been prepared earlier with the rediscovery of ancient materialism by the natural philosophers of the seventeenth century and with the increased focus on Epicureanism that was inaugurated by Gassendi. Earlier still, Renaissance scholars had laid the foundations for this dramatic shift with their renewed philological attention to the principal texts.<sup>1</sup> Being better preserved than the first-generation Greek atomists (Democritus and Leucippus), not least of all thanks to the poem *On the Nature of Things* by his Roman spokesperson Lucretius, Epicurus naturally moved into the limelight. The reception of



Epicurus was, however, not all positive, and not even his well-wishers were faithful exegetes of his philosophy. Consequently, the third-century atomist lent himself to various appropriations and misappropriations even as he was pilloried from different quarters. As a result, his name continued to flourish amongst his enemies and his allies alike. A case in point is Kant, who in his youth was a card-carrying Lucretian, and in his sager period could not help working Epicurean concepts into the foundations of his critical philosophy (*prolēpsis*; pleasure, pain, and the feeling of life; the sublime by way of Lucretius), while never missing an opportunity to attack the atomist as inimical to his projects.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps it is only the iconic status of Epicurus that can explain the fascination that he exercised over Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche in the next century. The coincidence of these three towering figures all training their sights on Epicurus is of some interest to scholars of antiquity, though anyone looking for illumination of Epicurean doctrine here is bound to come away disappointed. In one sense, though, it was hardly an accident that three such prominent if dissimilar philosophical figures should have taken so great an interest in Epicurus. All three were reared in the same classical traditions of Greek and Roman literature, history, and philosophy. And ancient atomism was fashionable again. But if their philology united them, their philosophies divided them.

In his dissertation, *Differenz der demokritischen und epikureischen Naturphilosophie nebst einem Anhange* (“Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophies of Nature, with an Appendix”), which he submitted for a doctoral degree in philosophy at Jena in 1841, Karl Marx (1818–83) set out to reclaim Epicurus from the opprobrium that had attached to the ancient philosopher starting with antiquity (Stoics mocked him for the absurdity of his physical hypotheses), then amongst the Christian Fathers (for his atheism), and finally in Marx’s own lifetime, not least in the published lectures of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), the most influential German thinker since Kant, whose lofty idealism, nourished by a strong preference for spiritual concepts and a disdain for all things material, had little patience for Epicurean naïveté. Hegel had briefly discussed Epicurus in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, and Marx, intrigued by materialism and dissatisfied with Hegel, decided to take issue with his great predecessor (abetted by his mentor, Bruno Bauer, a member of the dissenting Young Hegelians). Where Hegel had contrasted Epicurus with

Democritus (to Epicurus's discredit), Marx went the other way. The dissertation might as well have been called "Difference between Marx and Hegel," so polemical a reading of Hegel's *Lectures* does it represent. Like Hegel, Nietzsche (1844–1900) contemplated penning a work on *The History of Philosophy*, in which Epicurus would have featured prominently.<sup>3</sup> And, like Marx, Nietzsche was deeply attracted to materialism. But Nietzsche and Marx were famously incompatible thinkers, perhaps as incompatible as Nietzsche and Hegel. Nowhere do their differences crystalize more sharply than in their respective views of Epicurus.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, any comparison is bound to be skewed. Hegel's mentions of Epicurus are pretty much confined to his *Lectures*. Marx's encounter was brief, lasting only two years, and he would effectively ignore Epicurus in his later writings. Nietzsche, on the other hand, spent a lifetime thinking and writing about Epicurus, and he had ample opportunity to revise his views.

In what follows, which will be no more than a preliminary first sketch, Marx and Nietzsche will be of primary interest, as they have the most to say about Epicurus. But because Marx's dissertation cannot be understood without reference to Hegel, it will be essential to look back to him before examining Marx's own writings.

## HEGEL

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Hegel's most extensive encounter with Epicurus occurs in a brief section of the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, the first comprehensive edition of which appeared in 1833–36, immediately before Marx set to work on the subject. (The lectures had been delivered in Jena, Heidelberg, and Berlin between 1805 and 1831.)<sup>5</sup> As one might suspect of the author of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel finds the metaphysical postulates of atomism to be philosophically bankrupt, starting with Leucippus and Democritus, whose theory Hegel declares impoverished (*dürftig*).<sup>6</sup> In the wake of the early atomists, Epicureanism appears as a mindless victim of sensation, overwhelmed with particulars and incapable of higher orders of thought, concepts (*Begriffe*), and understanding (*das Begreifen*)—and utterly unmoored from rational teleology. In Hegel's eyes, the whole of

Epicurus's system is afflicted with uncertainty, from its metaphysical constituents to its divinities. Atoms collide in random patterns. They represent sheer events and nothing more, conditioned as they are by causes outside themselves. With nature so constructed, it can only ever fail to add up to a unified totality.<sup>7</sup> Can nature on the atomistic hypothesis even be *conceived* as such? At best, one can try to grasp the truth of nature by way of roundabout analogies, but these are mere metaphors and sensuous images that are based on hypothetical similarities, all pure speculation and fantasy—sheer poetic fiction (*Dichtung*).<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, Epicurus's philosophy is a trafficking in “unknowns” by way of further unknowns.<sup>9</sup> Then there is the materialist premise, utterly objectionable to the idealist Hegel. The notion that the soul should “consist of individual atoms and [that] the atoms are separated by void” is a non-starter: “Let's not waste our time with such nonsense any longer; these are empty words. We cannot have any respect for Epicurus's philosophical ideas; better yet, they are not even ideas to begin with.”<sup>10</sup>

Not content with this estimation, Hegel must prove it: he goes on to insure that concepts will only come to naught in Epicurus's system. Where Epicurus laid the foundations of empirical knowledge in the senses and sought to derive concepts on this basis, Hegel builds uncertainty into the very process of concept-formation. He does so by a peculiar sleight of hand that involves a substitution of a bad idea for a good one and a forced translation in the bargain. In a nutshell, Hegel will seek to tar Epicurus's notion of concepts (or thought) with the brush of atomistic void, literally emptying concepts of all meaning by reducing them to a hapless process that appears to have no explanation and no certain contact with outer reality as Epicurus claimed and required. All this will lay the groundwork for Marx, who will come to Epicurus's rescue with his dissertation. But first, let us turn to Hegel's demolition, which begins, appropriately enough, in an analysis of conceptual and epistemological error.

Error results, in Epicurean epistemology (Hegel summarizes), when the sensation that we have is impure and the representation that works its way into our minds produces a change such that the internal representation no longer corresponds to (no longer attests to) the object. At this point, another, different motion occurs within, distinct from that which flows from the sensation of the object. This “interruption”—or “break” or “rupture”

(*Unterbrechung*)—is the cause of the error.<sup>11</sup> Hegel puts considerable stock in this notion of interruption, which in itself is a slightly tendentious rendering of the original Greek term *dialēpsis* (διάληψις). *Dialēpsis* means something like mental “separation” or “distinction” (cf. *Ep. Hdt.* 58, 69; Arrighetti [31.16].23; [34.22].10; [35.12].7),<sup>12</sup> though in the present context Epicurus does appear to have in mind something like a break or rupture between an atomic process and its product, whether this product is ontological, conceptual, or implies property emergence (the whole question is hotly debated today).<sup>13</sup> As Diogenes reports, error results from “some other movement in ourselves [sc. other than the one conforming to the sensation], conjoined with, but distinct from (διάληψιν δὲ ἔχουσιν), the perception of what is presented” (*Ep. Hdt.* 51).<sup>14</sup> By this is meant that the possibility of error is introduced when an opinion is formed about a sense perception: the opinion may be true or false, depending on whether the opinion is subsequently confirmed by sensory evidence (*enargeia*) or not. Hegel continues: “This movement of our own is what Epicurus calls an interruption (*Unterbrechung*)... . The entire Epicurean theory of knowledge is reducible to these impoverished passages, which are in part either obscurely presented by Diogenes [Laertius] or else badly excerpted by him; a more impoverished theory is not possible to imagine.”<sup>15</sup>

The poor quality of the ancient report hardly prevents Hegel from embroidering on its implications to his satisfaction. In fact, he has already done so by claiming for the passage an emblematic status. What the passage probably describes is the formation, from within the mind, of an opinion about the truth or falsity of a sensation. This judgment, which is an internal movement of thought, is linked to the sensation but added to it as an independent process. Presumably, what the mind does is sort through its memory of similar sensations and then compare and evaluate them in order to produce a judgment of the veracity or falsity of the sensation.<sup>16</sup> Some kind of interruption must be involved that allows the mind to redirect itself from the immediate outer sensation to a memory bank of like sensations and then back again to the immediate sensation. Whether the swerve is involved in this process depends upon how one dates the invention of the concept, which may not have been available to Epicurus at the time of *The Letter to Herodotus*.<sup>17</sup> And though Hegel does not invoke the swerve directly as the cause of the interruption, he acknowledges that the swerve

pervades Epicurus's system and conditions all atomic events, imparting to them a fundamental contingency (*Zufall*) of motion and combination.<sup>18</sup> Hegel's idea of an interruption, then, is *prima facie* plausible, at least in some form or other. The way he goes on to expand the concept is another story.

Hegel continues:

Knowledge *qua* thought is determined entirely as a movement of its own [i.e., one not caused from without] that produces an interruption (*die eine Unterbrechung macht*) ...

which is to say, constitutes a rupture or break in the reception of sensory input.<sup>19</sup> So far so good, except that Hegel wants to fill in the meaning of *Unterbrechung* in a peculiar way, one that will be to Epicurus's detriment. First, he attempts to render Epicurus's concept of thought impotent at the very moment that it seems to assert itself against the outer sensory environment, and he does this by associating thought with the idea of the void (how he does this remains to be shown). Then he empties this concept of knowledge further by rendering it into an unknown and unknowable process of its own—as is everything else, he believes, in Epicurus's system. Hegel does all of this through a series of peculiar associations that are possible only on his own speculative dialectic, and on a rather chary account of atomism. Let's have a look.

Thought, Hegel writes, is to be regarded as an interruption (in the sense of a *hiatus*), and is in this way to be associated with void and with negation (for void is the negation, or interruption, of Being): “*Since the stream of atoms is interrupted by the void*, it is possible to stem this flood” through the action of thought.<sup>20</sup> The statement is in some sense true as it stands: void is the condition both of the possibility of motion and of motion's interruption. But void is not the sufficient condition for a change of motion. Hegel ignores this for the time being. To complete his reading he must equate void with interruption in the most general of terms: “The dialectical other of the atom is the void, the interruption (*Unterbrechung*), [the] *poros* [pore, opening, passage-way].”<sup>21</sup> At a stroke, thought can now be assimilated to void as an agent (or site) of interruption, even if the causes of this interruption are left utterly unexplained. Epicurus offered one such causal explanation: the exceedingly light and mobile nature of atoms that make up thought, and which allows for their redirection. But though Hegel

is familiar with this account, he is unimpressed by it: “—utterly vacuous [lit., thoughtless] notion” (*ganz gedankenlose Vorstellung*).<sup>22</sup>

Why thought should be any more susceptible to interruption, any more “afflicted (*behaftet*) by a negative principle, the moment of interruption (*Unterbrechung*),”<sup>23</sup> than the streaming of sense data or any other atomic motion is left obscure on Hegel’s reading. More than this kind of rupturing is needed to account for thought as a true interruption, to be sure: required on Epicurus’s account are, at a minimum, the unpredictability of the swerve, which breaks the chains of necessity that otherwise determine the course of the atoms, and some volitional factor that takes over once determinism has been breached. What is particularly offensive to Hegel is not so much the process of atomic rupture as its location in thought. But none of this matters in the end, for with his analogies in place, or rather his equations of thought with interruption, rupture, void, and the principle of negation or negativity, Hegel can now go on to reduce Epicurus’s canonic to a failed Hegelian dialectic, while literally voiding atomistic thought in the process. Hegel’s *reductio ad absurdum* is really just an impatient argument, and not a very good one at that.

As Hegel views things, Epicurus hits, somehow and almost by chance, upon the notion of a freely formed thought, one that interrupts the influx of sensation. This is something that Hegel is happy to applaud, since it represents an incipient triumph of the mind over the empirical world and the body and hence a speculative movement and determination of sorts.<sup>24</sup> Hegel implicitly links this virtual “swerve” of thought to Epicurus’s invention of the arbitrary atomic swerve and its rupturing of the chains of physical determinism. But true to form, Hegel will never allow Epicurus to savor his victories. Epicurus stumbles onto a good thing, but fails to grasp what it is that he has found. He lacks, precisely, the conceptual power, and above all the *respect* for the power of conceptuality, that would allow him to do so in the first place. Thus, Hegel goes on:

but what this interruptive motion is, now understood in an objective sense (*für sich*), Epicurus hasn’t got a clue.<sup>25</sup>

Worse, the interruption of atomic motion is in fact the distinguishing mark of all atomic motion.<sup>26</sup> The mind is mired in its atomistic composition. It is not entitled to celebrate a liberation from matter.



Hegel's final verdict on Epicurus is that his system is riddled with unwitting inconsistency. On the one hand, Epicurus wants to make reality essentially contingent ("chance rules everything"), but he also wants to "banish" thought as a form of Being-in-Itself (*Ansichseiendes*), which is to say that he makes thought into an absolute that, reducible neither to the "concept" nor to the "universal," is identical to the form of being that characterizes atoms and void, albeit in a way that works against nature through the act of interruption. On the other hand, Epicurus fails to recognize that his "atoms have the very same nature as thought has." By this Hegel does not mean that thought is made up of atoms, which would be a perfectly unobjectionable restatement of Epicurus, but rather that thought is "a kind of Being that is not unmediated, since it is essentially the result of mediation, and hence is negative or universal."<sup>27</sup> Translated into plain English, what Hegel means is that atoms are the product of thought, being conceptual devices for making sense of the world, rather than being preexisting material objects in the world, despite whatever Epicurus might claim to the contrary.

In this way, Hegel has managed to accomplish three things with his destructive analysis of Epicurus. He has made error and truth indistinguishable (for there is no criterion available to atomism for distinguishing truth from falsity).<sup>28</sup> He has driven a conceptual uncertainty into the heart of Epicurus's theory of knowledge (for, at bottom, Epicurus's theory acts out the motions, so to speak, of a theory, while being at a loss to explain its own foundations). And he has built a fruitless—interrupted—dialectic into the theory so that atomism in its Epicurean form will be guaranteed to be still-born and will never evolve, as it in fact never does, though for different reasons from those that Hegel ascribes to Epicurus's disciples. Epicureans remained resolutely loyal to their master's teachings, which stood above all challenges or corrections. But in Hegel's view, Epicurus's philosophy, to survive, must remain unreflective lest it notice its own absurdities:

[The evolution of the school] would have involved precisely a collapsing into understanding (*ein Verfallen ins Begreifen*), which would only have thrown the Epicurean system into a confusion[!]; for ... it was just this vacuity of thought (*Gedankenlosigkeit*) that was made into a principle [of the school].<sup>29</sup>



Hegel is merciless. In his assessment, Epicurus's theory is not merely unthinking, but it also represents the very interruption of thought.<sup>30</sup>

Having located the core issues of Epicurus's physics and metaphysics to his satisfaction, Hegel turns to Epicurus's morals and ethics. But this area of Epicurus's theory fares little better. The victim of arbitrary sensation and of mere particulars, moral thought can never rise above itself to discover its own justifications: "in this way morality is actually eliminated (*aufgehoben*), or [rather] the moral principle is in reality an immoral one."<sup>31</sup> But this is nothing new. It is just an extension of Epicurus's general habit of turning thought against itself: "thought is used precisely in order to inhibit thought; it acts in a negative fashion against itself."<sup>32</sup> Gods, by virtue of existing in the *intermundia*, understood (as Hegel understands them) as empty space and (therefore) as the realm of pure thought, are the final and highest expression of this Epicurean paradox. Their truest essence cannot be pressed to its logical conclusion on pain of utter contradiction: Are gods real or not? Are they "concretions" of atoms in compound structures or autonomous beings that exist in and of themselves (as an In-itself)? In some sense, they display the full force of the negation of sensation, "and this negation is thought." All this:

appears ridiculous, but it is coherent with the above-mentioned *Unterbrechungen* and the relationship of the empty to its realization as full (the atom).<sup>33</sup>

And yet, in the end such questions are of little import, since even atoms are no more than creatures of thought, mere figments of the mind (*nur Gedankendinge*), or rather of *Geist* and the Concept, as both lurch forward into modernity<sup>34</sup>—well past Epicurus, who turns out to have been not only mindless and thoughtless (*gedankenlos*),<sup>35</sup> but decidedly inimical to thought, to abstraction, to universality, and to the notion of the In-itself as a necessary feature of the Being of the Concept. The irony is that "Epicurus banished thought in the form of Being-in-itself," or rather what he understood this to be, by reducing reality to atoms (and void), but not to the Concept, "without noticing (*ohne ... zu denken*) that his atoms themselves had the nature of thought," because they were generated by thought and in no other way. In other words, Epicurus was an idealist who mistook himself for a realist. Alas, "such is the inconsequential reasoning of all empiricists."<sup>36</sup>

# MARX

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Marx, already in his posthumously published dissertation, sets out to stand Hegel on his head, and he does so by making a case for the coherence and significance of Epicurus's thought in the history of philosophy in a way that Hegel could never have countenanced. Behind this reversal of Hegel lies an equally powerful move: a rejection of the classicizing bias that jaundices Hegel's account of all philosophy after Plato and Aristotle. Marx sets the tone with his very first sentence:

Greek philosophy appears to have run up against something that a good tragedy should never encounter, namely a dull ending ... Epicureans, Stoics, and sceptics are viewed as an almost unseemly postscript that bears no relationship to its powerful premises.<sup>37</sup>

The very notions of birth, flowering, and decline, which are the actual premises of this kind of view, Marx adds, are themselves "vague" notions, capable of encompassing much but of comprehending nothing, while "decline is presaged in the living," and it is just as specific and valuable a characteristic as "the very shape of life."<sup>38</sup>

Marx then turns to Democritus, whose philosophical positions, as the early co-founder of atomism, he will measure against those of Epicurus, the school's later representative. On Marx's view, it is Democritus, not Epicurus, who harbors uncertainty, self-contradiction, and confusion. Is he a materialist or a sceptic? Is truth something that can be known or does it lie forever hidden "in the depths"?<sup>39</sup> Are atoms real, while all else is mere subjective appearance? Or are sensual appearances real, being an ineliminable part of the physical world?<sup>40</sup> Caught on both horns of this dilemma (Marx calls it an "antinomy"), Democritus is unable to escape the consequences: his system is fatally at odds with itself in its conceptual foundations. Objectivity and subjectivity are forever "at war." By contrast, Epicurus resolves the antinomy by adopting a dogmatic, not sceptical, view of reality: appearances are real and irrefutable, as real as the atoms that constitute them: they have an objective and no longer subjective value. In accepting atomism's first principles, but in refusing to grant appearances a "merely intentional" (*Nur-Gemeinten*), subjective value, Epicurus asserts his freedom from Democritus's epistemic hardships.<sup>41</sup>

A good deal follows from this principled decision. In Epicurus's wake, Democritus now appears as a pseudo-empiricist. Insecure in his foundations, he is "driven" into empirical observation, *in search* of evidence that would resolve his intellectual dilemmas, but never able to satisfy this desire, which is structurally built into his theoretical position.<sup>42</sup> Epicurus, on the other hand, is a philosopher characterized by lassitude and "boundless nonchalance":<sup>43</sup> he is "satisfied and blissful in philosophy."<sup>44</sup> He experiences true freedom, which rests on a freedom from a desire to know empirically anything in particular. Hence, he "despises the positive sciences," for they can contribute nothing to "genuine perfection."<sup>45</sup> This latter is given immediately in sensation, in pleasure, and in a general indifference towards Being. Where Democritus must seek out iron-clad laws of physical necessity and determinism, Epicurus is content to let the world unwind according to the whims of contingency and the caprices of the human will. In conceding so much independent and as it were discretionary reality to Being, Epicurus can adopt a corresponding independence from its demands: this is the source of *ataraxia*, or freedom from mental disturbance, which Marx describes as a kind of contingency of thought (*Zufall des Denkens*), corresponding to Epicurus's free embrace of contingency in the physical world.<sup>46</sup>

Rather than devolving into a passive spectator sport or a dereliction of the mind's rational duties, such a stance permits Epicurus to develop his philosophy into a highly engaged theory and practice of perceptual and conceptual reflection. In fact, one of the virtues of his philosophy, in Marx's view, is that the functions of sensual perception and mental conceptualization are mutually involved at every level and work themselves out in tandem. They are not stymied and confused, stuck in a stalled dialectic as Hegel felt they were. On the contrary, they demonstrate a sophisticated and seemingly logical advance over earlier philosophical speculation. The contrast with Democritus in particular is designed to bring out this philosophical evolution. Side-glances at Epicurus's contemporaries and rivals, the Stoics and the Sceptics, provide a further contrast.

Epicurus's first step towards a radical break with Democritus occurs in his reconception of the atom. For Democritus, the atom exists as a purely material postulate or substrate (*stoicheion*: "element"). Inaccessible to appearances, "it sinks down to the material basis," where "it exists only in

the void,” in a kind of formal death, embodying, *qua* “abstract particularity,” “freedom from existence, not freedom in existence.”<sup>47</sup> So conceived, it illuminates nothing, and least of all itself. From this perspective, Democritus’s epistemological despair is easily understood. Truth truly *does* lie in the depths—invisibly and irretrievably so. On the other hand, Marx declares the very concept of the atom to be a formal contradiction, as it requires the ascription of phenomenal qualities (shape, form, and weight) to what is in essence a brute material quantity; owing to this contradiction, the atom is “alienated (*entfremdet*) from its concept” (which Marx also calls its “form”).<sup>48</sup> Hegel had noted a similar difficulty in his critique of Epicurus, whose account of atomic qualities he labeled a “gratuitous fiction.”<sup>49</sup> The problem, lurking within the concept of the atom and hidden from view, is for Marx the actual source of Democritus’s epistemological anxieties.

Democritus evaded the problem; Epicurus confronts it head on.<sup>50</sup> He does so by seizing on this contradiction within the Democritean system, which is the contradiction between matter and form, or between existence and essence, and then by transforming this into the positive condition of a newly reconceived atomism. Alienation (the alienated concept of the atom) is redeemed. A repressed or unwitting dilemma is made into a principle (*archē*) of consciousness—phenomenal and conceptual consciousness. And consciousness is raised to a new degree of self-consciousness. This, in a nutshell, is the sum and substance of Epicurus’s advances over Democritus. In targeting Epicurus, Marx’s implicit lesson is that philosophy could only advance by thinking its way, not past (as Hegel impatiently would have liked) but through the complexities of matter and materialism. The ways in which Marx works out Epicurus’s solutions to the dilemmas of atomism are therefore all the more revealing of Marx’s own attitudes towards materialism, at least at this early phase of his evolving thought.<sup>51</sup>

Epicurus’s first move, according to Marx, is to reconceive the atom as a dynamic principle rather than the inert bit of matter that Democritus had conceived it to be. And to do this he has to view the atom as asserting itself in a radical fashion, by negating its surroundings (space), in much the same way as time is a negation of space.<sup>52</sup> The association of time and atomism will become increasingly relevant in Marx’s analysis. This conquest of space through self-assertion occurs when the atom swerves without cause:

by means of the swerve the atom lays claim to its “pure formal determination,” its “individuality,” and its freedom from physical necessity.<sup>53</sup> In this new-found independence, the atom resembles a celestial body,<sup>54</sup> a point that will also come to dominate Marx’s analysis. The swerve represents the “soul” of the atom, its conceptual identity, and the idea of its abstract particularity<sup>55</sup>—something that Democritus’s atoms lacked. In this way, Democritean atoms, conceived as Beings in-themselves (as potential, inert, and material)—become distinctively Epicurean atoms, conceived as Beings for-themselves (actual, dynamic, ideal, and abstract). This, too, is an honor that Hegel had denied to Epicurean atoms, as we saw.<sup>56</sup>

Marx’s interpretation of the swerve is without a doubt the most famous element of his dissertation. It allows for radical contingency in nature and for subjective freedom, a point that Marx reiterates in his notebooks to the dissertation.<sup>57</sup> As such, it makes for a poignant allegory of the incipient bourgeois subject en route to its self-realization and ultimate emancipation from the clutches of external determinants, one that is easily overstated.<sup>58</sup> But the value of the swerve goes far beyond this charming political allegory. In making atoms into dynamic principles, the swerve permits them to engage in a fruitful dialectic with nature and the mind. It does this first by “realizing” the internal contradiction of atomism, and then by redeeming its largest ethical implications.

Marx’s logic, in its most general outlines, runs as follows: the aim of individual action, exemplified by the atom, is to swerve, to abstract itself, to avoid (*ausbeugen*) pain and confusion;<sup>59</sup> existence as a whole is the object of a universal avoidance; “and *therefore the gods avoid the world (beugen die Götter der Welt aus)*, cease to care about it, and live outside of it.”<sup>60</sup> In paving the way for a distantiated apprehension of the world by a subject, the swerve’s ultimate function is ethical: its implications bear on voluntarism (self-determination) and on a vitalist embrace of subjective life, which on Marx’s view captures the ultimate thrust of Epicurus’s hedonism. And the ethical stance of Epicureanism, conceived as directing us to “a form of life,” lies at the very heart of Marx’s appreciation of the ancient atomist. Explaining how all this works will take a bit more unpacking.

On Marx’s reading the swerve is central to atomism for a few different reasons. First, it is through its declension, the movement away from a direct free-fall, that the atom “abstracts [itself] from existence, which stands over

and against it, and withdraws from the same.” This is a moment of “negation,” in which the atom asserts its relative difference against other atoms, which must in turn be redeemed by another, positive moment—the moment of self-affirmation, in which the atom, so to speak, declares its own existence. Self-affirmation is only possible, Marx claims, through such an act of alienation, and more specifically through the mutual repulsion, via physical contact, of atoms. This is how atoms “realize” their identities, by achieving a formal abstraction from their material existence and by entering into dynamic configurations.<sup>61</sup> Here, Marx is giving Epicurus an insight into the subjective process that Hegel would not—or rather, he is allowing atoms to enter into dynamic relations that permit, or simply prefigure, higher and more interesting levels of organization.<sup>62</sup> The leap to social relations is easily made: “And in truth ... a person ceases to be a product of nature” when she goes through an identical process and encounters her peers in “material relationships.”<sup>63</sup> In this way, the *lex atomi* translates directly into a *lex individui*: “repulsion is the first form of self-consciousness.”<sup>64</sup> Material encounters are sublated into ideal ones, and relationship are spiritualized, or at least put on the road to spiritual realization—which is to say, idealization. How atoms can know all this is another question,<sup>65</sup> but we are in the milieu of German speculative philosophy at its finest hour, and not witnessing the history of philosophy as it is conducted today. But we should at least note that even as Marx assimilates atomism to speculative philosophy, at the very moment of the atoms’ abstraction and idealization, he will never entirely let go of its materialist premises. Atoms remain caught up in a web of material relations with one another, and this characterization will run through the whole of Marx’s reconstruction of Epicurus’s system.

Having accounted for the atom’s affirmative negation of space, Epicurus’s next innovation is to redeem time. Where Democritus banished time as unreal, Epicurus reinstates time as “the absolute [and ‘pure’] form of appearance.”<sup>66</sup> This is a powerful reading by Marx, as it permits him to read Epicurus’s theory of appearances as a phenomenology of matter, albeit one that inserts the dimension of time into the very perception of the world. On this view, sensation just is the perception of change and of bodies as accidents. Time is the perception of this perception—of change as change and accident as accident. Combining these thoughts, Marx arrives at the



following account of Epicurean sensation: “Human sensation is thus embodied time, the existing reflection of the world of the senses within itself.”<sup>67</sup>

One key term here is the word “reflection.” Marx’s point is that Epicurus marks an advance over Democritus, and indeed over all of his predecessors, in achieving for the very first time in the history of philosophy a notion of “appearance as appearance” (*Erscheinung als Erscheinung*),<sup>68</sup> which is to say a degree of reflection on appearances that was never available before. It is worth noting that Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* had reserved the same distinction to account for the arrival of “truth” in one of its highest forms, namely as the “supersensual realm Beyond.”<sup>69</sup> So this is a very high, and a very un-Hegelian, compliment to Epicureanism being awarded here by Marx.

The second crucial term in Marx’s statement is “embodied.” The reflection on and of the world that is won by sensation is achieved in the very act of sensation itself. It is sensation, reflecting on itself in the act, that gives rise to the sense, and the concept, of time:<sup>70</sup> time is the time of sensation and the time it takes to notice the distance that sensation has traveled. A union or synthesis of man and nature takes place:

human sensation (*Sinnlichkeit*) is thus the medium in which, as in a focusing device, the processes of nature reflect on themselves and ignite into [viz., are transformed into] the light of appearance.<sup>71</sup>

A corollary of this view is that things, insofar as they are phenomenal, are endowed with an intrinsic and mortal temporality (Marx speaks of “*die Zeitlichkeit der Dinge*”), while their sensation is the perception of this temporality (this is what is meant by the “embodied temporality” of perception and sensation). In other words, when we take in the world, what we take in is not only its appearance, but also its dissolution and passing away (*Diremption; sich auflösen; vergehen*).<sup>72</sup> Time in effect consumes matter. Only, it does so not in a material way, but in a *formal* way, as we shall see.

Marx can add this dimension of temporality to the Epicurean world and can applaud it as an advance over the Democritean conception of reality because of his conviction that time conveys a sense of the intrinsic contradiction between the matter and the form of reality—a distinction that



was lost on Democritus. With the advent of time, matter becomes abstract, or rather it is abstracted from its materiality: all determinate existence (*Dasein*) is destroyed, annulled, and led back to a state of Being-for-itself.<sup>73</sup> This is the speculative moment that moves the dialectic of form and matter forward. Thus:

Time is the fire of essence (*das Feuer des Wesens*), which eternally consumes appearances and imprints upon them a seal of dependency and non-essentiality (*Wesenlosigkeit*).<sup>74</sup>

As a result, two things happen to matter simultaneously: through reflection, it enters into the dialectic of self-consciousness and nature (which is to say, it is elevated to a new philosophical plateau of the ideal); and through sensation, it enters into concrete experience and practice as a humanly consumable entity. The contrast is again with Democritean atoms, which, we should remember, were purely material things, inaccessible to the senses, and (as eternal beings) immune to the ravages of time, but also, paradoxically, occupying a kind of eternal death;<sup>75</sup> they were truly “atomistic” entities, standing in relation neither to themselves<sup>76</sup> nor to anything else.<sup>77</sup> In sum, they represented a kind of *anomie* in nature, one that Marx found abhorrent.

From here, Marx passes to an unexpected quadrant in Epicurus, his theory of celestial phenomena (*die Meteore*, τὰ μετέωρα).<sup>78</sup> It is here that Epicurus makes his boldest and most radical moves, turning his face not only against Democritus, but also “against the entire Greek race.”<sup>79</sup> The heavens, the traditional seat of ever-lasting divinity, presented Epicurus with the greatest challenge to his notion of *ataraxy*. Nature cannot be permitted to include anything eternal, anything not subject to change or diminution, apart from the atoms themselves. How could he find a way round this obstacle? Marx’s solution to Epicurus’s problem, or rather to what he perceives to be Epicurus’s problem, is strained but intriguing. It is to concentrate, in effect, all the antinomies of matter into the concept of the heavenly bodies, which (Marx claims) are the same antinomies as those that afflict atoms but which now are instantiated in a highly visible way.<sup>80</sup> The response of the Epicurean, meanwhile, is to stand back and allow these problems to play themselves out on their own, while observing them with an attitude of complete indifference. In effect, the antinomies do not so much resolve as they dissolve in the *ataraxic* mindset of the Epicurean

philosopher, for whom all such problems are now a matter of indifference. But much in fact happens behind the scenes.

If atoms are “matter in the form of independence and particularity, [and] are so to speak weight made visible (*die vorgestellte Schwere*),” then celestial bodies, Marx reasons, are “the highest reality of weight,” and therefore are “atoms made real”:<sup>81</sup> they are the highest and most profound concretization of the atomic principle. And yet here, in Epicurus’s theory of matter at its pinnacle, in his theory of heavenly bodies, a rupture occurs in his system. For Epicurus’s single goal is to degrade the matter of the heavenly bodies and “to draw them down into mundane impermanence.”<sup>82</sup> And to do so would be to ruin the hypothesis of atomism: atoms cannot be anything but permanent. Faced with this impasse, Epicurus lights upon another way to achieve his aim. He does so through a speculative turn, which Marx describes in this way: “The whole of Epicurean natural philosophy is pervaded by the conflict between essence and existence, between form and matter ... *but in the heavenly bodies this contradiction is extinguished, the conflicting moments are reconciled (versöhnt)*.”<sup>83</sup> They are reconciled because a dialectical process has ensued:

In the celestial system matter received form into itself and subsumed particularity into itself, and in this way achieved independence.<sup>84</sup>

It achieved a kind of independence that not even the world of atoms could achieve, existing as they do in a barren material world, locked in an endless conflict with form, each side canceling out the other. But celestial matter is a different kind of matter: it is matter that, thanks to its internalization of form, has “become concrete particularity, [which is to say] universality,” which must mean that celestial matter constitutes a particularization of universality in the form of a concrete universal. And, “*at this point [matter] ceases to be [the] affirmation of abstract self-consciousness.*”<sup>85</sup>

That is to say, in this stand-off between the desire for ataraxy and for the transcendence of matter on the one hand and the unshakeable reality of matter on the other, a transformation occurs on both sides. Matter and consciousness diverge, once and for all, in the visible gap between the heavenly bodies and their perception by a subject here on earth. Self-consciousness emerges, like a chrysalis, as an entity distinct from matter, “and declares itself to be the true principle [of Epicurus’s philosophy], and

[as such] is hostile to the newly independent nature ... its brilliantly gleaming refutation [and] mortal enemy.”<sup>86</sup> Self-consciousness, we can only say, arises out of the *ashes* of nature, which it negates in the very act of conceiving nature as (abstractly) possible—“for what is possible can also be different.”<sup>87</sup> The principle of atoms—their concept (their *archē*)—negates their eternal character (as material element, or *stoicheion*); matter is vanquished in the process of being reconciled to a higher purpose. The next phase, one that Epicurus never attained,<sup>88</sup> would be to convert abstract possibility into real possibility and real actuality, and then both into real necessity. This would once again mark an advance over Democritus, who knew only empirical real possibility and “relative necessity” in the form of determinism.<sup>89</sup> A higher form of realized possibility and actuality would be these same things conceived as *reflectively* determined necessity.<sup>90</sup> But one would have to wait for Hegel to complete this circuit of logic.<sup>91</sup>

There is much drama to this speculative logic *à la* Hegel. But there is also much at stake in Marx’s reading. One issue, still alive amongst Marx’s commentators, is whether Marx in his dissertation is endorsing or criticizing Epicurus, and whether Marx is either knowingly or unknowingly sacrificing the possibility of empirical science. The question is fairly intricate, and also potentially controversial: I happen to believe that most if not all these interpretations hinge on a misconstrual of Marx’s argument. A quick look at the relevant parts of Marx’s exposition will help us arrive at a clearer view of the problem.

The heavenly bodies represent the greatest challenge to atomism not simply because they are the conventional seat of divinity, fate, providence, and all that surpasses human control, but also because in their vast unknowability, be this physical or metaphysical, they present a palpable stumbling block to the human intellect, which in the normal course of things responds by resorting to instinctual fear, most commonly in the guise of superstition and the more unsettling forms of religion. In order to dispel this fear, Epicurus takes a different route from the reductionism of Democritus, according to whom the heavens were conglomerations of atoms and void. The price Democritus paid for this move was to displace anxieties about nature onto the mind of the natural scientist, as Marx claimed to show, and as Epicurus knows very well, for instance in a passage

from *The Letter to Herodotus* that is not cited by Marx but is doubtless in his sights.

Knowledge of celestial events contributes nothing to happiness, and if anything it detracts from happiness. For:

Those who are well-informed about such matters and yet are ignorant what the heavenly bodies really are, and what are the most important causes of phenomena, feel quite as much fear as those who have no such special information—nay, perhaps even greater fear, when the curiosity excited by this additional knowledge cannot find a solution or understand the subordination of these phenomena to the highest causes.<sup>92</sup>

For Marx, Democritus's view of the celestial realm also meant a reification of science. Science, as pursued by Democritus, could progress no further than its own hypotheses allowed: it could never overcome itself and, consequently, could never achieve self-consciousness.<sup>93</sup> Epicurus, meanwhile, demonstrated how the ultimate forms of pleasure and tranquility could be sought out in the contemplation of the greatest menace to mankind, the starry heavens—by staring these in the face, not with fear or desire but with *complete indifference*. His solution was not to seek out the ultimate causes of celestial phenomena, but simply not to care what they were. In Marxese, “nothing that the ataraxy of individual self-consciousness destroys can be eternal”<sup>94</sup>—nature above all.

This does not spell the end of science, as most readers of Marx have assumed, but only its first beginnings, which Marx locates in the discovery of the universal and the application of the Concept to nature.<sup>95</sup> One of the difficulties standing in the way of this reading lies in making sense of a key text:

If abstract individual self-consciousness is posited as an absolute principle, then indeed all true and real science is eliminated and preserved (*aufgehoben*), to the extent that (*in so weit ... als*) individuality does not predominate in the nature of things themselves.<sup>96</sup>

On Marx's view, Epicurus affirms this form of self-consciousness. But this does not entail that Epicurus undermines science. Science is eliminated to one extent—to the extent that Epicurus forfeits on, say, discovering the singular cause of a phenomenon. But science is by no means utterly negated (as the qualifier, *in so weit aufgehoben . . . als*, universally ignored, suggests alone). Quite the contrary, Epicurean physics rests on securing a sound

scientific method.<sup>97</sup> Nor is it correct to claim for Epicurus, or for Marx's version of him, that "*tout est possible*."<sup>98</sup> You cannot live forever; nothing can come from nothing; fish do not spring from the ground and cows do not grow in trees (Lucr. *DRN* 1.159–73). If Epicurus is not interested in "knowledge of nature in and for itself" but only in "the ataraxy of self-consciousness,"<sup>99</sup> this again is not a sign of epistemic failure. In the place of "knowledge of nature in and for itself," Epicurus would have endorsed, rather, a project in (the satisfactions of) self-consciousness, which would have entailed a sublated and elevated (*aufgehoben*), which is to say, a refined and preserved, form of science.

There have been further misconstruals of Marx. The Epicurean atom, *qua* principle, is not abstractly universal;<sup>100</sup> it is *concretely* individual and universal.<sup>101</sup> The statement, "this is his greatest contradiction" ("*Dies ist sein größter Widerspruch*"),<sup>102</sup> is not Marx's accusation of Epicurus (*pace* several of his readers). The statement should be understood in the following way: "This is the greatest contradiction that Epicurus faced" before he hit upon a solution to the problem. That is, it refers to a moment that precedes Epicurus's recourse to a new method, which entails the "dissolution" of atomism as its final realization and its "conscious opposition to the universal."<sup>103</sup> Entailed is nothing more than the resolution of atomism as a praxis founded on the self-conscious principle that was guiding Epicureanism all along. The shift in accent between the two forms of atomism, Democriteanism and Epicureanism, is indeed monumental. Whether it merits awarding to Epicurus the praise of being "the greatest Greek figure of enlightenment (*der größte griechische Aufklärer*)"<sup>104</sup> may be discussible. But there is no disputing Marx's admiration for the man and his achievements.

Marx's dissertation as we have it is incomplete. He also left behind seven sizeable notebooks from the years leading up to 1841, all pertaining to the dissertation. These occasionally cast more light on his thoughts, especially on one area which needs to be further underscored: the ethical thrust of Epicureanism, which will help to clarify what Marx may have meant when he thought of Epicurus as a great figure of enlightenment. Surely one of the traits he had in mind was Epicurus's generous optimism towards the world—something that might appear counterintuitive given Epicurus's physical postulates and his presumptive indifference towards

reality, death, contingency, and so on. But Marx is right. There is nothing indifferent in the claim that subjective appearances are real, therefore meaningful; that pleasure is the highest good; that life is the implied locus in which human happiness is to be sought; that the world is a place of possibilities, not of blank nihilism.<sup>105</sup> As Marx writes in his first notebook, and in direct opposition to Hegel:

The principle of philosophy for Epicurus is to show the world and thought as *conceivable*, as *possible*.<sup>106</sup>

And this is, indeed, the general tenor of Epicurus's philosophy. The trick, of course, is that (at least in Marx's view) the world is possible only to the extent that it is conceivable; thought and possibility go hand in hand: securing a place for the subject in the world is the ultimate goal of Epicureanism, even if that means rendering the world an ultimately insecure, contingent, and uncertain place. But underlying this wish to secure a place for the subject in nature is a kind of universal desire that Marx feels he can see running through all the major philosophical systems in antiquity: "We are told that a desire for Being (*der Wunsch des Seins*) is the oldest form of love." "Indeed," Marx continues, "the most abstract and therefore the oldest love is the love for one's self (*die Selbstliebe*), the love of one's particular Being."<sup>107</sup> How does Epicureanism satisfy either desideratum?

It does, quite beautifully, if strangely, on Marx's reconstruction, by assuring individuals that they will persist *qua* Being even when they exist no longer as individuals after death: for they will, at that point, continue to exist in the form of imperishable and immortal atoms: "what is ensouled returns to the atomistic form," and "death is at the same time the vehicle of vitality."<sup>108</sup> Subjects are thus forever guaranteed a surrogate eternity in their very own physical make-up, which is to say, in their constitutional universal being (their *Grundform*): "eternity prevails over transience."<sup>109</sup> The world is in this way positively affirmed, and subjects have a secure place in it. The desire for immortality in any other form is a destructive illusion and is in fact a disparagement of life itself, whereas to value life is to desire the very good that atomism offers, the fact of atomistic eternal being.<sup>110</sup>

Thus, in Epicureanism, "life is not sublated (*aufgehoben*) into some higher sphere."<sup>111</sup> It is returned to itself in its elemental, physical nature,



which is to say, to its essential universality. Grasp this and you will realize how in Epicureanism “the individual is emptied of its extraneous determinations; it is determined as such in [an act of] celebration” as it “cries out for joy” at its release from anxiety.<sup>112</sup> But isn’t it a contradiction to reinvest atoms with imperishability again? Not at all, Marx reassures us, because everything in nature transpires at the level of universality and consciousness. All that is “eternally fulfilled” are the requirements of the interaction of these two ingredients, which guarantees first “that the eternal prevails over the ephemeral,”<sup>113</sup> and second that the universal (the atom) will forever assume “the form of individuality as consciousness” and not the form of empirical matter itself.<sup>114</sup> Following the same logic, divinity is not a separate kind of pleasure, but almost the formal condition of this subjective release, the subject’s own internal awareness of its own condition of joy and pleasure (*Freude*):

That which is divinized and celebrated here [in the Epicurean concept of the gods] is divinized individuality as such ... in its *ataraxia*. What is worshipped as god is the non-existence of god, but [god understood] as the existence of the joy of the individual.

This worship of the divinity of being, so to speak, takes the form of sensuous pleasure (*voluptas*).<sup>115</sup> Such is the “negative dialectic”<sup>116</sup> of atomism, which weaves a path between “a de-divinized nature” (*eine entgötterte Natur*) and “an unworlded divinity” (*einer entweltete Gott*)<sup>117</sup> and which discovers, in the wreckage of its own mortal divisions and diremptions, “the vehicle of vitality” and the “ecstasy” of life itself.<sup>118</sup> For in the final analysis, Epicurus’s philosophy is a philosophy of life and an affirmative ethics of vitality. Materialism has been redeemed—as a vibrant phenomenology of sensuous spirit.<sup>119</sup>

Marx never returned to Epicurus, not because he had refuted him in his dissertation, as some wrongly still imagine, but for other reasons that we can only speculate about. The most plausible explanation is that as Marx moved away from Hegel and more deeply into politics it was only natural that he should distance himself from Epicurus, whose political philosophy was premised on the negation of politics, and whose salvaging in the dissertation was merely a first stage in a more radical break with Hegel.<sup>120</sup>



## NIETZSCHE

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Like Marx before him, and even more so than Hegel, Nietzsche found it productive to gauge an understanding of Epicurus by setting him against his atomistic predecessor Democritus, at least some of the time—the more so since Nietzsche had begun a dissertation of his own on Democritus during his university days, one that he never completed, nor did he ever intend it to fulfill any formal requirements.<sup>121</sup> But Nietzsche's views are quite unlike those of Hegel and Marx. For starters, he had a much stronger affinity for Democritus than for Epicurus, and he never fully relinquished this bias. His *Democritea* project, as he called it, was a multi-faceted research program on which he spent two to three years of intensive activity from mid-1867 to mid-1869, and again in 1870, though traces of it persist in his notebooks until 1877, shortly before he abandoned university life. Over the course of this time, Nietzsche matured as a scholar, a philologist, and a philosopher. Epicurus was never the center of his attention during this period, but he was an important if occasional foil, as the following two notebook entries well illustrate:

One must not overlook the idealist in Democritus. His motto remains, “the thing in itself is unknowable,” and that separates him from all realists for ever. But he believed in its existence.

The deliverances of the senses, according to Epicurus, give us the truth itself. Cf., e.g., <Cic.> *De fin.* 1.19 [*sic*; read: “1.64”]. This wasn't the view of Democritus. Epicurus passed from atomism to realism. According to Democritus we have absolutely no knowledge of truth. Sext. *Emp. Adv. math.* 7.135 [*sic*; read: “7.135 + 7.136”]: “Democritus demolishes what appears to the senses and says that none of them appears as it truly is, but only as it is thought to be. The truth concerning what exists is that there are atoms and void—‘for we do not know how each thing is or isn't in reality.’”<sup>122</sup>

The resemblances to Marx are striking. Both confront the exact same issues, at least initially. And both are happy to transpose the disagreements between the two ancient atomists in terms of a modern contrast between idealism and realism, understood in a typically German and speculative way.<sup>123</sup> And yet, for all these similarities, their judgments come out exactly reversed. On Marx's reading, Epicurus is the idealist (with his heady endorsement of self-conscious reflection) and Democritus the realist (driven as he is to empiricism out of his search for an ultimate reality that forever

eludes his grasp). What is more, Nietzsche plainly favors the earlier atomist, whom he finds by far the more attractive figure in his complexly baffled stance towards reality. The simpler, coarser realism of his descendant who is readily satisfied with sensuous immediacy holds few attractions for Nietzsche at this early date, and this stance will more or less dictate his responses to Epicurus over the next two decades.

As Nietzsche's thinking evolved, Epicurus increasingly came to the fore as a kind of permanent touchstone and an emblem of historical depth, with a far greater frequency than even Democritus—not the Epicurus who invented the swerve (the swerve is conspicuously absent in Nietzsche's writings), but the philosopher whose views hold a variety of implications for ethics and for life. And though Epicurus is nowhere as frequent in Nietzsche's repertoire of ancient names as Socrates or Plato, he is surprisingly common, and probably comes out somewhere near the top of the list of ancient authors named by Nietzsche. His name occurs well over 150 times in hundreds of passages, twice as often as Democritus's. In a word, Epicurus is a frequent, almost obsessive presence in Nietzsche's published and unpublished writings after 1872. What is most surprising in Nietzsche's recourse to Epicurus after *The Birth of Tragedy*, however, is not the abundance of mentions that Epicurus earns, but the variety of hues in which he appears. Nietzsche can adore him in places and he can vilify him in others. His virtues and vices are sometimes identical, and sometimes discreetly different. One might conclude that Nietzsche is simply being inconsistent in his views of this Greek thinker. A better solution to the problem is to acknowledge that there is no one Epicurus in Nietzsche's thinking. He is more like a figure of thought and a literary device, capable of taking on different colors according to the requirements of the moment. And, unlike the Hegelians, who treated Epicurus as a passing moment in the forward march of Spirit, Nietzsche reads Epicurus into a much wider cultural and historical landscape, where he is made to stand, symbolically, for any number of forces, tendencies, and potentials within the complex psyche of evolving Western culture. The end result is a fascinating kaleidoscopic portrait, one that is doubtless distortive in its details but true of Epicurus's various receptions up through the nineteenth century. The contrast with Marx or Hegel could not be any more striking.

This is also why Nietzsche can claim with tongue-in-cheek hyperbole that Epicurus has lived on “eternally” and anonymously:

“*Eternal Epicurus*”—Epicurus has been alive at all times and is living now, unknown to those who have called and call themselves Epicureans, and enjoying no reputation amongst philosophers. He has, moreover, himself forgotten his own name: it was the heaviest pack he ever threw off.<sup>124</sup>

No such creature existed in the Hegelian tradition, Marx included, which left Epicurus behind in the dust, a casualty of history and of progress. For Nietzsche, Epicurus is crucially and permanently alive.<sup>125</sup> Nietzsche’s aphorism points to Epicurus’s unending capacity to signify, and it does so by playing off of two conceits, the indestructibility of atoms and the Epicurean saying, “Live unnoticed” (*lathe biōsas*). Only now the life in question is one of an afterlife and an anonymous dispersal: Epicurus lives on as a spiritual essence and a dispersed presence, very like atoms whirling through the void, whether amongst those who would inherit his mantle (while forgetting who Epicurus was) or amongst those who have adopted his ways unbeknownst to themselves.<sup>126</sup> All of Nietzsche’s mentions of Epicurus attest to the validity of this claim. His reading of Epicurus is a reading of this reception, which is to say of the ways in which Epicurus successfully managed to insinuate himself into his posterity and into Nietzsche’s own historical present.

Nietzsche felt that he had a unique insight into Epicurus, one that was partly grounded in his training as a classicist and partly rooted in a peculiar affinity he had with the philosopher—or perhaps we should say, in an insight that arose from what Nietzsche learned (or else feigned) to cultivate as an affinity, whether for reasons of convenience or utility (more on this in a moment).

Thus we read in *The Gay Science* from 1882:

*Epicurus*—Yes, I am proud to experience Epicurus’s character in a way unlike perhaps anyone else and to enjoy, in everything I hear or read of him, the happiness of the afternoon of antiquity: I see his eyes gaze at a wide whitish sea, across shoreline rocks bathed in the sun, as large and small creatures play in its light, secure and calm like the light and his eye itself. Only someone who is continually suffering could invent such happiness—the happiness of an eye before which the sea of existence has grown still and which now cannot get enough of seeing the surface and this colourful, tender, quivering skin of the sea: never before has voluptuousness been so modest.<sup>127</sup>

This is an extraordinary claim, coming from the mouth of someone who until recently had modeled his scholarship and much of his thought on Democritus, and who had shown a clear preference for Democritus over

Epicurus.<sup>128</sup> Evidently, somewhere along the line Nietzsche found it essential, or useful, to reappraise Epicurus. One can only speculate about the reasons for this *volte face*, though several spring to mind. Epicurus's position in world history must have appeared to be more interesting and discussable than that of Democritus. A Hellenistic philosopher who was basking in the warm glow of the decline of Greece and facing towards the advent of modernity, and who was tantalizingly pitched on the edges between religion, philosophy, and science, Epicurus was a pivotal figure, and an irresistible one at that.<sup>129</sup>

Being a transitional figure, Epicurus was also rather chameleon-like, or at least he could be made to seem so depending upon how the light was allowed to reflect off his portrait. Simultaneously turned towards the world and away from it, a hedonist and an ascetic, an atomist and a moralist, a combatant of godly superstitions and a fashioner of superhuman gods of his own, Epicurus could be made out to be, at different turns, a pessimist, an optimist, a sceptic, an indifferentist, and a believer, a forerunner of contemporary science or a harbinger of Christianity, naïve or calculating, Apollonian or Dionysian, a figure for classical Greek cheerfulness and thus healthy, heroic, and idyllic (“one of the greatest of men”), or else a symptom of degraded decadence.<sup>130</sup> For the most part, however, Epicurus proved to be some unstable combination of these features in Nietzsche's writings, rarely just one or the other, as the passage just quoted from *The Gay Science* illustrates. There, the sunny superficiality of Epicureanism is, like Democritus's empiricism according to Marx, the sign of an urgent need rather than a stable state. It is a *voluptas* (divine thrill of pleasure) that is lined with abyssal depths of darkness and despair (*horror*) (Lucr. *DRN* 3.28–30). And indeed, pleasure and pain map out the full range of the Epicurean sensorium in equal measure. As Nietzsche writes in his preface to the 1886 edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*: “Was Epicurus an optimist—precisely because he was *suffering*?”<sup>131</sup> In many ways, Epicurus in passages like that from the *Gay Science* above (and there are several of its kind) has taken over the role of Apollo in *The Birth of Tragedy*, whose function there, as the god of the surface and of appearances, was to screen the self from deeper-lying metaphysical truths, the ultimate consequences of which could be fatal. But this convergence of Epicurus and Apollo, though striking,

should not really be all that surprising: the traces of their collusion are already palpable in the opening pages of Nietzsche's first book.<sup>132</sup>

Nietzsche's reading of this last aspect of Epicurus and of Epicureanism, portrayed as a kind of tragic cheerfulness towards reality, occasions some of his most deeply moving passages on Epicurus—perhaps because they are finally not about Epicurus at all. Another text, this time from a notebook from 1885, is a good example, as it develops the same thought a little further:

There is a misunderstanding of cheerfulness, which cannot be eliminated: but whoever shares it should ultimately be satisfied with it—those of us who *take refuge* in happiness: we who need every kind of south and boundless sunshine and need to take a place on the street where life waltzes by like a drunken masquerade, as something that takes away your senses and makes you mad; we, who precisely demand of happiness *that* it should “take away our senses”: doesn't it appear that we have a knowledge that we *fear*? With which we do not want to be alone? A knowledge whose pressure causes us to tremble, whose whispering makes us grow pale? This stubborn aversion to tragic performances, this harsh stuffing of the ears before every source of suffering, this bold, derisive superficiality, this willful Epicureanism of the heart, which wants to have nothing warm and whole and worships the *mask* as its ultimate divinity and savior: this scorn for the melancholic of taste, in whom we always suspect a lack of depth, isn't this all merely a hatred of life? It seems that we know ourselves as all too fragile, perhaps as broken and beyond healing already; it appears that we fear this hand of life, that it must break us, and so we take refuge in its appearances, in its falsehood, its superficiality and dappled deceptiveness; it appears that we are cheerful, because we are tremendously sad. We are serious, we know the abyss; *for this reason* we defend ourselves against all manner of seriousness.<sup>133</sup>

The beauty of passages like these is the depth of feeling they evoke. Epicureanism is clearly being made to stand for a whole complex of emotions, some of them historically verifiable in the philosophy of the atomist, others freely generalized so as to take in a larger body of individuals whom Nietzsche stylizes as latter-day Epicureans—“Epicureans of the heart”—amongst whom, one is tempted to say, Nietzsche numbers himself. Or does he? Identifications are risky and fluid attractions in Nietzsche's writings—fleeting, mask-like, uncertain, and functioning as virtual lures and traps for a reader.

Nevertheless, the notion that serenity is wrung from the depths of suffering is more or less a constant in Nietzsche's writings from *The Birth of Tragedy* into his final works. Epicureanism can signal either this deeper form of wisdom or its aversion. Wherever the latter occurs, wherever a subject remains willfully obtuse to her own suffering, Nietzsche can be a

stern critic of Epicurus or Epicureanism, which he finds too readily “accepts suffering” and therefore “resists everything sad and profound.”<sup>134</sup> In such cases, Epicureans, because they cannot truly suffer, can experience no orders of difference in the world, no *pathos* of difference, no distinctions of rank, and no “spiritual arrogance”;<sup>135</sup> they are therefore morally confused.<sup>136</sup> This leveling of affections, this equanimity of the passions, and the spiritual indifference that results, naturally inclines Epicureanism towards a certain democratization of the soul, a weakening of the instincts, a turn towards goodness and sociability (*Gemütlichkeit*), decadence, the satisfactions of the earthly paradise (the garden), a lassitude and quiescence of the will, and the absence of any urgency in life, any sense of a “task” or project worth undertaking.<sup>137</sup> The very “concept of future” is lacking in Epicureanism, Nietzsche observes. In its place, the view forward extends as though over a flat plane: to be an Epicurean is to entertain “no wish, not even any velleity, no desire to make plans, no desire for change.”<sup>138</sup> For the Epicurean, whom Nietzsche facetiously ventriloquizes in this same passage:

There are really no surprises in life; the reason for this is because I do not like to busy myself with what might be possible. This proves how much I live in thought ... An accident (*Zufall*) brought this to my awareness (*Bewußtsein*) a couple of days ago.<sup>139</sup>

Nietzsche is parodying the intellectualism and the ineffectuality of Epicurus’s *Lebensphilosophie* here, which he elsewhere correctly notes is staked not on discovering truth, but on cultivating “the art of living.”<sup>140</sup> He is also parodying the role of chance and contingency (*Zufall*) in Epicurus’s philosophy, and the Sage’s capacity to conform to the hazards of the unknown, even those of thought itself, on a day-to-day basis with complete nonchalance. Nietzsche’s ruthless depiction of the Epicurean attitude here could not be any more unlike Marx’s if he tried (though the convergences are strictly accidental, so to speak—or else uncannily inevitable).<sup>141</sup> As if in a point-for-point rebuttal, Nietzsche is turning upside down every positive item in Marx’s reading of Epicurus, from his applauding of contingency to his extolling the power of self-consciousness, the primacy of thought, and the virtues of possibility (“the principle of philosophy for Epicurus,” Marx had written, “is to show the world and thought as *conceivable*, as *possible*”).<sup>142</sup> Both may concur in the fact of Epicurus’s “boundless

nonchalance” (the phrase is Marx’s). But their assessments are strikingly different.

Nietzsche’s assessments can, however, be self-discrepant, as we have seen. Though Epicurus’s lifestyle can in places be described as a form of asceticism that involves the rigors of self-control<sup>143</sup> and “a life full of pain and renunciations”<sup>144</sup> elsewhere the comparison breaks down: “ascetics acquire an enormous feeling of power” when they carry out their self-abnegations and their denials of the world.<sup>145</sup> But not so the Epicureans:

They find happiness in ... fearlessness before gods and nature; their happiness is *negative* (as is pleasure, according to Epicurus) ...

while their feelings are “neutral and weak,” not powerful.<sup>146</sup> Ascetics are creatures whom Nietzsche normally both fears and loathes (as a glance at the Third Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* will confirm). Epicureans, under the present description, are too weakly to register even a single hit on Nietzsche’s “dynamometer.” They are more like Buddhists than priests, just as their modern avatars are “a sort of European Chinadom.”<sup>147</sup> Schopenhauer is one more latter-day Epicurean and European Buddhist: he is the extrapolation of the ancient philosophy of quiescence in its modern, nihilistic form, and so too the exponent of “the hypnotic sense of nothingness, the repose of deepest sleep, in short *absence of suffering*.”<sup>148</sup> Nietzsche here is in fact *quoting* from Schopenhauer, who himself had linked Epicurus’s highest form of pleasure to the stilling of the Will’s desires in *The World as Will and Representation*.<sup>149</sup> Drawn in this light, Epicurus and his allies are beginning to look like a sorry lot indeed. But worse is to come.

Perhaps Nietzsche’s deepest insult to Epicureanism is his assimilation of the philosophy to Christianity. Democritus could not be accommodated to Christianity,<sup>150</sup> unlike Epicurus, who could. The reason was quite simple: in a marked departure from earlier atomism, Epicurus condoned religiosity. Even as he vanquished ancient superstitions and paved the way for modern science,<sup>151</sup> he nevertheless erected a defense of conventional divinities and religious piety on the foundation of his physical and ethical principles. This did entail a bold reconception of the gods—as remote, eternally cheerful, immense in size, beautiful, quasi-material and quasi-immaterial, possibly



consisting of no more than the streaming of atomic films (*eidōla* or *simulacra*) or even less if they are mere projections of human preconceptions of divinity. Nietzsche's response to Epicurus's views on religion and the divine is mixed. On the one hand, he can praise the Epicurean gods as the pinnacle of the Greek creative achievement, as the finest product of that "artists' nation" (*Künstlervolk*), not least because they embody "the triumph of existence and an abundance of vitality (*Lebensgefühl*)."<sup>152</sup> At his most enthusiastic, Nietzsche will even go so far as to identify the Epicurean gods with his own conceptual gods, the Overman<sup>153</sup> and Dionysus<sup>154</sup>—though at other moments he will just as quickly deny them this distinction.<sup>155</sup> But while Epicurus is in places acknowledged to have combatted Christianity in its latent or preexisting forms,<sup>156</sup> elsewhere and for the most part he is said to be uniquely compatible with Christianity and consequently to be a decadent spirit, no better than any other modern or Romantic.<sup>157</sup>

To say that Nietzsche's view of Epicurus is multi-faceted would be an understatement. Nietzsche thinks both with and against Epicurus in his own inimitable fashion, allowing his own writings and voicings run through every imaginable register and scale in the process. His portrait of Epicurus is about as similar to those by Marx and Hegel as a Jackson Pollock is similar to a Rembrandt. Unlike the Hegelians before him, Nietzsche fastens on to no one feature of Epicurus's thought in order to grasp it, be this the idea of "interruption," the swerve, alienation, chance, or the dialectical rupture that Epicurus achieved or failed to achieve in his own system. This is not simply because Nietzsche's Epicurus is less interested in physics than in ethics,<sup>158</sup> but also and primarily because his Epicurus is not a single entity. Rather, he is a figure for cultural variety and a symptom of cultural change. Had Nietzsche known anything about the Hegelians' readings of Epicurus, he would doubtless have incorporated them into his analysis. But he did not, and so we can only speak of Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche on Epicurus as one of the many happy coincidences of nineteenth-century thought.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity*.

<sup>2</sup> Kant, *Universal Natural History* (1755) = AA 1.212, 226; *Critique of Pure Reason* B208–25, esp. B208 = AA 4.206–24; 4.208 (*prolēpsis*; Epicurus); *Critique of Judgment* §29 = AA 5.277–78 (Epicurus; feeling; life; pleasure). On Kant and Lucretius, see Porter, "Lucretius and the Sublime."

<sup>3</sup> 12[1]; 1888. Citations in this form are to Nietzsche's notebooks, cited after the KSA edition (Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*). Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

<sup>4</sup> It is unlikely that Nietzsche knew of Marx's dissertation on Epicurus, which appeared in print for the first time in 1902, or that he cared to read Hegel either.

<sup>5</sup> For general background on Hegel's *Lectures*, see Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 1–42; De Laurentiis, *Subjects in the Ancient and Modern World*.

<sup>6</sup> Hegel, *Werke*, 18.353–68. References by volume are to this edition, which reproduces the text of the 1833–36 edition that Marx would have used. The *Lectures* span vols. 18 and 19. Translations are mine.

<sup>7</sup> 19.314.

<sup>8</sup> 19.317, 314, 312.

<sup>9</sup> 19.314.

<sup>10</sup> 19.322.

<sup>11</sup> 19.308.

<sup>12</sup> This last fragment was emended by Laursen, “The Early Parts of Epicurus”; see Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 76 for the text with discussion.

<sup>13</sup> See Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, 76–78 and *passim* for discussion. For the descriptive possibility, see Atherton, “Reductionism, Rationality and Responsibility,” 214.

<sup>14</sup> Trans. Hicks, *Diogenes Laertius*, adapted.

<sup>15</sup> 19.309.

<sup>16</sup> See Asmis, “Epicurean Empiricism,” 89–95.

<sup>17</sup> See Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action*, 144–51. See Masi, *Epicuro e la filosofia della mente*, ch. 6; also Englert in this volume.

<sup>18</sup> 19.312–13.

<sup>19</sup> 19.309.

<sup>20</sup> 19.309, emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> 19.309.

<sup>22</sup> 19.322.

<sup>23</sup> 19.311.

<sup>24</sup> As does interruption in general (understood as void), which permits motion, from which other developments can and do ensue (Hegel, *Werke*, 5.185, in his *Science of Logic*).

<sup>25</sup> 19.309.

<sup>26</sup> 19.313.

<sup>27</sup> 19.313.

<sup>28</sup> So close are the two processes, one might easily mistake Hegel's account of “error” for an account of the way in which Epicurus arrives at truth. This is how Hegel was understood by his editor and pupil, Michelet, who believed that with “interruption” Hegel was referring to erroneous thought pure and simple, rather than to judgments of truth and error: “We know the objective world when its atoms flow in just as they are. *Error arises out of the void, out of an interruption of the influx of the atoms*, whereby the atoms come to be dislocated and changed, and in this way they produce our imaginings and our dreams” (Michelet, “Ueber Idealismus und Realismus,” 3–4, emphasis added).

<sup>29</sup> 19.334.

<sup>30</sup> There is an additional destructive consequence of Hegel's reading of Epicurus, namely the impression he gives that Epicureanism is ridden with interruption, when in fact it appears to have presupposed a great deal of natural regularity at both the microscopic and macroscopic levels. See Bobzien, “Did Epicurus Discover the Free Will Problem?,” esp. 337: “The swerve ... was meant to ... mak[e] the mental dispositions of adult human beings non-necessary [i.e., non-necessitated]... . This is possible without great interruptions and ‘out-of-character’ developments, if one assumes a certain frequency of the swerves [and] a generally stable atomic structure of the mind.”

<sup>31</sup> 19.323.

<sup>32</sup> 19.334.

<sup>33</sup> 19.330.

<sup>34</sup> 19.335.

<sup>35</sup> 19.322, 334.

<sup>36</sup> 19.313.

<sup>37</sup> Marx, “*Differenz*,” 21; all translations mine. (For an English translation, albeit one not based on the critical German edition, see Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 1.23–107.) Sannwald, *Marx und die Antike* on Marx and antiquity is fundamental, and has some good pages on the dissertation. The early piece by Bailey, “Karl Marx on Greek Atomism” is a rare study by a classicist, one who remains puzzled if respectful. Gabaude, *Le jeune Marx et le materialisme antique*, the only book-length treatment, is energetic but flawed. The best essay known to me is McIvor, “The Young Marx and German Idealism.” See below.

<sup>38</sup> “*Differenz*,” 22.

<sup>39</sup> “*Differenz*,” 25.

<sup>40</sup> “*Differenz*,” 25–26.

<sup>41</sup> “*Differenz*,” 26.

<sup>42</sup> “*Differenz*,” 27.

<sup>43</sup> “*Differenz*,” 30.

<sup>44</sup> “*Differenz*,” 27.

<sup>45</sup> “*Differenz*,” 28.

<sup>46</sup> “*Differenz*,” 31.

<sup>47</sup> “*Differenz*,” 47. This verdict is typically taken as a condemnation by Marx of Epicurus (see n. 95), but this is to overlook the fact that the position being described by Marx is held by Democritus, not by Epicurus, who surmounts it (see below).

<sup>48</sup> “*Differenz*,” 48. Strictly, Marx says this: “the world as it appears can arise only out of the qualified [as opposed to purely quantitative] atom, [viz., an atom] that has been perfected and alienated from its concept.”

<sup>49</sup> “*Differenz*,” 312.

<sup>50</sup> “*Differenz*,” 39–43.

<sup>51</sup> A raging question in the literature is how much of a materialist Marx shows himself to be in his dissertation. The proposals, which range all over the map, are neatly summarized by McIvor, “The Young Marx and German Idealism,” 398–99 (his own view appears on p. 404). Marx’s vivid interest in materialism is, I believe, indiscussible, and equal only to his desire to fuse it with Hegelian idealism. See below.

<sup>52</sup> “*Differenz*,” 35.

<sup>53</sup> “*Differenz*,” 35, 36.

<sup>54</sup> “*Differenz*,” 36.

<sup>55</sup> “*Differenz*,” 37.

<sup>56</sup> Here, Hegel was siding with Kant, who found Epicurus to be “outrageous” (*unverschämt*) for having introduced the unnatural perversion of this deviant motion (the swerve) into nature (Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1.227).

<sup>57</sup> “*Differenz*,” 26; MEGA 4.1 contains the seven notebooks, or “Hefte”, that led up to the Dissertation (translations mine; published translation available in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 1.405–509, though not based on the more recent critical German edition). These notebooks date roughly from early 1839 to February 1840.

<sup>58</sup> As, for example, by Gabaude, *Le jeune Marx et le materialisme antique*, 60: “Atomes égaux entre eux et dieux équivalents expriment l’individualisme et le refus de l’autorité” (with nothing in Marx to back up this paraphrase).

<sup>59</sup> See Lucr. *DRN* 2.251–60 with Bobzien, “Did Epicurus Discover the Free Will Problem?,” 310.

<sup>60</sup> “*Differenz*,” 37; emphasis in original. A curious term, *ausbeugen* (lit. “bending out of the way,” as if by swerving) is cognate with *ausbiegen*, and is equivalent to *ausweichen*, “to withdraw from,” “stand back from.” Nietzsche writes in a similar vein (but without the connotations of “swerve”) when he defines Epicurus’s “pessimism”: “das ‘Ausweichen’ als ‘göttlich’ empfunden,” “‘withdrawal’ [from the world] was viewed [by Epicurus] as ‘divine’” (8[15]; 1883). Hegel’s term for “swerve” was “*abweichen*” (19.313).

<sup>61</sup> “*Differenz*,” 38. “For the atoms are themselves their sole object, and they can be related to one another—in spatial terms, [can] come into mutual contact—only when any relative existence of these same atoms that might put them in relation to other entities is negated. And this relative existence is their original movement, that of falling in a straight line, as we have seen. Thus, atoms first make mutual contact through their declension from the [straight line].” Emphasis in original.

<sup>62</sup> Fenves, “Marx’s Doctoral Thesis,” 441 finds it “strange” that Marx should fail to attribute (“never mentions”) attraction to Epicurean atoms, which would complete their speculative *Aufhebung* as entities existing for-themselves and endowed with an essential qualitative unity, as Hegel would argue in his *Science of Logic* (Hegel, *Werke*, 5.186–208; cf. *Encyclopedia* §262 in *Werke* 9.60–63). But why should we expect Marx to do so? Epicurean physics knows only repulsion, while Hegel is describing modern Newtonian physics, which has fundamentally different properties and laws. As it happens, “*ein System der Repulsion und Attraction*” is in fact attributed by Marx to atoms by way of their analogy to celestial bodies, which he calls “*die wirklich gewordenen Atome*” (55). But Marx makes little of this mistaken attribution, and rightly so. He finds more interesting ways to redeem Epicurean matter, along the lines described in this essay.

<sup>63</sup> “*Differenz*,” 38–39.

<sup>64</sup> “*Differenz*,” 39.

<sup>65</sup> Anthropomorphism is rampant. Cf. “*Differenz*,” 36 where the swerve practically endows atoms with “consciousness.”

<sup>66</sup> “*Differenz*,” 48, 49.

<sup>67</sup> “*Differenz*,” 50.

<sup>68</sup> “*Differenz*,” 49.

<sup>69</sup> “Das Innere oder das übersinnliche Jenseits ... kommt aus der Erscheinung her, und sie ist seine Vermittlung; oder die Erscheinung ist sein Wesen und in der Tat seine Erfüllung... Das Übersinnliche ist also die Erscheinung als Erscheinung” (*Werke* 3.118). A famous phrase, this appears to be its only occurrence in Hegel.

<sup>70</sup> “*Differenz*,” 50.

<sup>71</sup> “*Differenz*,” 50.

<sup>72</sup> “*Differenz*,” 50

<sup>73</sup> “*Differenz*,” 49.

<sup>74</sup> “*Differenz*,” 49.

<sup>75</sup> “*Differenz*,” 47.

<sup>76</sup> “*Differenz*,” 49.

<sup>77</sup> Hegel would have concurred with some of these assessments (see his *Science of Logic*: Hegel, *Werke*, 5.185), but Marx adds drama.

<sup>78</sup> *Meteore* is misleadingly rendered as “meteors” in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, and commentators unwittingly follow suit. In Greek scientific writing after Aristotle, *ta meteōra* (τὰ

μετέωρα), which Marx is rendering with *die Meteore*, means “lofty things,” literally “things on high.” The natural referent of *ta meteōra* includes all celestial phenomena, from the appearance and behavior of heavenly bodies (rising, falling, shining, eclipsing, etc.) to atmospheric events (wind, weather, lightning, rainbows, etc.). But the extended meaning of “meteorology” includes terrestrial phenomena, such as earthquakes and subterranean winds. All of these physical phenomena are on display in Epicurus’s *Letter to Pythocles*, from which Marx is quoting, although Marx is interested only in Epicurus’s treatment of celestial bodies as they appear to us.

<sup>79</sup> “Differenz,” 51.

<sup>80</sup> It is tempting to include time itself amongst these higher-level antinomies, given how the heavenly bodies are one of the more visible ways in which time is calculated (the sun and moon, and the movement of the planets).

<sup>81</sup> “Differenz,” 55.

<sup>82</sup> “Differenz,” 56.

<sup>83</sup> “Differenz,” 56; emphasis in original.

<sup>84</sup> “Differenz,” 56

<sup>85</sup> “Differenz,” 56.

<sup>86</sup> “Differenz,” 56.

<sup>87</sup> “Differenz,” 56.

<sup>88</sup> “Differenz,” 30, 31.

<sup>89</sup> “Differenz,” 30.

<sup>90</sup> See *Science of Logic*, in Hegel, *Werke*, 6.202–13.

<sup>91</sup> For a lucid explanation of this modal logic, see Longuenesse, *Hegel’s Critique*, ch. 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ep. Hdt.* 79; trans. Hicks, *Diogenes Laertius*, 2.609.

<sup>93</sup> “Differenz,” 57.

<sup>94</sup> “Differenz,” 57.

<sup>95</sup> Differently, McCarthy, *Marx and the Ancients*, ch. 1 (esp. 39–40); Stanley, “The Marxism of Marx’s Doctoral Dissertation”; Shafer, “The Young Marx on Epicurus”; McIvor, “The Young Marx and German Idealism,” 409–10.

<sup>96</sup> “Differenz,” 57.

<sup>97</sup> Asmis, *Epicurus’ Scientific Method*.

<sup>98</sup> Gabaude, *Le jeune Marx et le materialisme antique*, 68.

<sup>99</sup> “Differenz,” 31.

<sup>100</sup> Stanley, “The Marxism of Marx’s Doctoral Dissertation,” 141, 151.

<sup>101</sup> “Differenz,” 56, 47.

<sup>102</sup> “Differenz,” 56.

<sup>103</sup> “Differenz,” 58.

<sup>104</sup> “Differenz,” 57.

<sup>105</sup> See Porter, “Epicurean Attachments.”

<sup>106</sup> Marx, “Hefte,” 21, emphasis added; cf. 26.

<sup>107</sup> “Hefte,” 60.

<sup>108</sup> “Hefte,” 62, 106.

<sup>109</sup> “Hefte,” 61; cf. 60.

<sup>110</sup> “Hefte,” 63.

<sup>111</sup> “Hefte,” 63.



<sup>112</sup> “Hefte,” 57.

<sup>113</sup> “Hefte,” 61.

<sup>114</sup> “Hefte,” 63.

<sup>115</sup> “Hefte,” 57.

<sup>116</sup> “Hefte,” 106.

<sup>117</sup> “Hefte,” 87.

<sup>118</sup> “Hefte,” 106.

<sup>119</sup> See Porter, “Epicurean Attachments” on this aspect of Epicurus’s philosophy, and the final chapter of Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity*, aptly titled “The Sweetness of Life,” on the attractions that this aspect of Epicureanism held for the moderns.

<sup>120</sup> Yet even here Epicurus paved the way for a further recuperation. See “Hefte,” 38 which commences with another reference to heavenly bodies (*Meteore*), and then continues: “The premise of the ancients is the deed of nature, that of the moderns is the deed of Spirit. The struggle of the ancients could come to an end only once the visible heavens, the substantial ties of life, and the gravity of political and religious existence were shattered. For nature had to be broken in two so that Spirit could become unified within itself.” Epicurus’s appeal to these same heavenly bodies has its final *raison d’être* in this logic, which is all Marx’s.

<sup>121</sup> See Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus*. The literature on Nietzsche and Epicurus is even more sparse than that on Marx and Epicurus, but richer than in the case of Hegel. See esp. Bornmann, “Nietzsches Epikur”; Vincenzo “Nietzsche and Epicurus”; Caygill, “Under the Epicurean Skies”; Ansell-Pearson, “Attachment to Life, Understanding Death” and “Heroic-Idyllic Philosophizing.”

<sup>122</sup> Nietzsche, BAW, 3.328.

<sup>123</sup> Compare Hegel’s assessment of atomism as idealist in its early (Hegel, *Werke*, 18.358) and late forms (see above).

<sup>124</sup> *Human, All Too Human*, 2.2.227; 1880; trans. Hollingdale.

<sup>125</sup> Neatly amending a notebook entry from 1867–68: “Democritus is the only philosopher who is still alive today” (BAW 4.84).

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Nietzsche, KSA 10.654–55, 15[59]; 1881 on the way ancient philosophical life-practices have quietly filtered into the habits of later culture, foremost amongst them Epicureanism.

<sup>127</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1.45; trans. J. Nauckhoff.

<sup>128</sup> See Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus*, 26, 29, 34–126.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. KSA 8.566, 33[9]; 1878.

<sup>130</sup> Caygill, “The Consolation of Philosophy,” 47 calls these shifts “bewildering.” These shifts are, however, the hallmark of Nietzsche’s portrayals of Epicurus from his earliest philological studies (see Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus*, 26, 29, 59, 305–306 nn. 90–91, etc.; Porter, *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*, 133–34).

<sup>131</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, 8: (“An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” §4).

<sup>132</sup> See *The Birth of Tragedy* §1 on the Lucretian character of Apolline dreams, with discussion on the Epicurean background to this in Porter, *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*, 36–40.

<sup>133</sup> KSA 12.79, 2[33]; 1885; emphasis in original.

<sup>134</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 270; trans. Norman.

<sup>135</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 270; trans. Norman.

<sup>136</sup> KSA 10.285–86, 7[129]; 1883.

<sup>137</sup> KSA 11.456, 34[108]; 1885; 13.162, 11[365]; 1887.

<sup>138</sup> KSA 13.510, 16[44]; 1888; cf. *Human, All Too Human*, 2.295; 1880.

<sup>139</sup> KSA 13.510, 16[44]; 1888.

<sup>140</sup> KSA 12.363, 9[57]; 1887.

<sup>141</sup> It is unlikely that Nietzsche knew anything about Marx's dissertation on Epicurus, which appeared in print for the first time in 1902.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. KSA 7.456, 19[114]; 1872–73: "The Epicureans tarnished the rigorous principles of Democritus with mushy ideas (possibilities)."

<sup>143</sup> KSA 9.62, 3[53]; 1880; cf. *The Gay Science*, 375.

<sup>144</sup> KSA 8.575, 38[1]; 1878, and so on.

<sup>145</sup> KSA 9.151, 4[204]; 1880.

<sup>146</sup> KSA 9.151, 4[204]; 1880.

<sup>147</sup> KSA 11.72, 25[222]; 1884; cf. *Beyond Good and Evil* 61.

<sup>148</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 3.6, 3.17; trans. Kaufmann.

<sup>149</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1.3.38.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. KSA 11.151, 26[3]; 1884; 11.553–54, 36[11]; 1885.

<sup>151</sup> *Daybreak* 1.72 (1881); *The Gay Science* 375.

<sup>152</sup> "The Dionysian Worldview," 2 = KSA 1.559–60; 1870; cf. KSA 9.660, 16[8]; 1881–82.

<sup>153</sup> KSA 10.244, 7[21]; 1883; 10.529, 16[85]; 1883; 11.541, 35[73]; 1885. The first hint of this comes in *The Birth of Tragedy* §1; see Porter, *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*, 37 with 180 n. 10.

<sup>154</sup> KSA 11.541, 35[73]; 1885.

<sup>155</sup> KSA 11.646, 40[35]; 1885; cf. KSA 11.33, 25[95]; 1884. The comparison could easily be an analogy without any real substance to it.

<sup>156</sup> Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 58; KSA 13.486, 16[15]; 1888.

<sup>157</sup> "Epicureanism in Christianity," in KSA 13.265, 14[87]; 1888; cf. KSA 10.477, 14[3]; 1883; *The Anti-Christ*, 30; Epicurus "the typical decadent," espousing a "religion of love"; *Beyond Good and Evil*, 61; *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, "We Antipodes"; 1889; KSA 13.324–25, 14[141]; 1888; *Gay Science*, 370. The basic thesis of Caygill, "Under the Epicurean Skies," that Epicurus "exceeds" Dionysianism and Christianity, cannot be supported.

<sup>158</sup> So too Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, 27 whose history of philosophical materialism greatly impressed Nietzsche, and whose predilection for Democritus Nietzsche likewise shares. See Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus*, 306 n. 91, 319 n. 5, 403 n. 151.

<sup>159</sup> A version of this essay was presented at the Philosophy Department at Emory University in February 2011 and at the Philosophy Department at McGill University in 2014. My thanks to both audiences for helpful feedback, and to Phil Mitsis, Phoebe Garrett, and Simone Stirner for editorial and other comments.

## CHAPTER 31

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# POSTMODERNISM

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EVA MARIE NOLLER AND W. H.  
SHEARIN

IN discussing their philosophical position on anger, the well-known classicist and scholar of Epicureanism Don Fowler once referred to the Epicureans as “perhaps the least postmodern thinkers the world has ever seen.”<sup>1</sup> Such a remark, coming from a scholar who was not only well-disposed toward postmodern thought but in fact known above all for his postmodern, theoretical readings of the classical canon, seems to mark out “postmodern Epicureanism” and “postmodern Epicurus” as unlikely terms.<sup>2</sup> And it is easy to see what Fowler means: postmodernism, though a protean concept, is often associated with scepticism of various kinds—scepticism about grand narratives, scepticism about the reliability of language<sup>3</sup>—whereas Epicureanism eschews a sceptical epistemology, generally viewing such a stance as “inherently self-defeating.”<sup>4</sup> Yet even if “postmodern Epicureanism” has a whiff of the paradoxical about it, as the present chapter discusses, there are nonetheless a variety of reasons for investigating the term—and a variety ways in which it may be apt.

In the first instance, Fowler clearly employs “postmodern” as something other than a mere chronological descriptor. (There could be but little point

in the obvious assertion that the Epicureans are not postmodern simply because they belong to the ancient world.) Yet “postmodern” is often deployed precisely in a chronological fashion, to denote an intellectual and cultural movement that followed upon, and drew impetus from, modernism.<sup>5</sup> In other words, one can (and—to a large extent—this chapter will) consider “postmodern Epicureanism” by investigating the fate of Epicureanism in the postmodern age, meaning roughly the philosophical understanding and reception of Epicurean thought in the latter part of the twentieth century. In the second place, however, one may also speak of “postmodern Epicureanism” (taking “postmodern” in a sense much closer to Fowler’s) and mean that there are at least certain postmodern elements or strands—that is, thematic features such as a distrust of grand explanatory narratives or a focus upon the unreliability of language—either in the work of Epicurus himself or at least legible in the writings of his ancient followers. This second, stronger sense, while it would not be an apt descriptor for all the material considered in this chapter, is nonetheless an idea that hovers as something of a persistent question throughout its pages. How, in other words, does a philosophy that seems, at least on its face, resistant to postmodernism nonetheless become incorporated into that body of thought?

In what follows, we consider three prominent philosophical figures of the postmodern age—Hans Blumenberg, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Serres—who all engage with Epicureanism in detail.<sup>6</sup> Yet—and this observation is perhaps telling for the fate of Epicureanism in the latter portions of the twentieth century—with the exception of Derrida, it would be difficult to assert that these figures belong without reservation to any canon of postmodernism. We shall return in our conclusion to a fuller consideration of the ways in which this grouping offers us a properly postmodern Epicurus (if there may be such a thing), but—even at the outset—the mere density of references to Epicurus and Lucretius found in these three authors may allow us the minimal suspicion that postmodernism and Epicureanism have something meaningful to say to one another, even if their voices do not always speak in concert.

## HANS BLUMENBERG

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Throughout his work, Hans Blumenberg (1920–96) draws extensively on Epicurus and Epicureanism. Yet apart from the well-known *Shipwreck with Spectator* (“Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer” (1979)),<sup>7</sup> Blumenberg’s overall reception of Epicureanism has been largely neglected, and it still awaits a properly detailed scholarly analysis.<sup>8</sup> While the present brief survey in no way provides the full consideration needed—in hopes of offering a somewhat closer inspection of the modes and functions of Epicureanism in Blumenberg’s œuvre—it takes, in addition to some moments in *Shipwreck*, Blumenberg’s *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (“Die Legitimität der Neuzeit” (1966/1988))<sup>9</sup> and *Cave Exits* (“Höhlenausgänge” (1989))<sup>10</sup> as points of reference.<sup>11</sup> As indicated above, although these works were written and published during the period commonly called postmodern, Blumenberg is not obviously a postmodern philosopher in the strongest, thematic sense of that term. Of course, aspects of his work—especially his metaphorology, which will receive treatment below—can be linked to more canonically postmodern thinkers such as Michel Foucault or Jacques Derrida,<sup>12</sup> yet his philosophy as a whole, which bleeds across the fields of anthropology, phenomenology, history of science, and metaphorology, is distinct from these other figures and as such deserves fuller attention. Moreover, while Blumenberg is rightly considered a philosophical thinker, his works are often understood as imposing, monolithic tomes within the domain of intellectual history, and this historical orientation colors many aspects of his reception of Epicureanism.<sup>13</sup>

In *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence* (“Daseinsmetapher”), the picture of the spectator depicted in the proem of the second book of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* (2.1–2: *Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis / e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem*)<sup>14</sup> is followed through its reception history and *Wirkungsgeschichte*.<sup>15</sup> The Lucretian spectator stands aloof and secure, looking on as another toils amidst the hostility of the sea, in what is generally taken by classical scholars as a paradigm for how the Epicurean philosopher views the suffering of others with serenity.<sup>16</sup> Yet Blumenberg gives this proem an altogether different interpretation. On his understanding, the pleasure, or sweetness (*suave*), experienced by the spectator:

has nothing to do with a relationship among men, between those who suffer and those who do not; it has rather to do with the relationship between philosophers and reality; it has to do with the advantage gained through Epicurus' philosophy, the possession of an inviolable, solid ground for one's view of the world (*Weltansicht*).<sup>17</sup>

Thus, according to Blumenberg, Lucretius does not present a portrait of perverse pleasure, showing an observer taking delight and self-assurance from the sufferings of another person.<sup>18</sup> Rather, on Blumenberg's reading, the Lucretian proem points to a pleasure and self-assurance (which could be linked to the Epicurean concept of *ataraxia*) based in knowledge. Hence, Epicureanism offers a central point of reference not for *Schadenfreude* but for an epistemology that enables man to deal with the world around him.

This analysis is also connected to a central, anthropological question present throughout Blumenberg's œuvre: how does one orient oneself in a non- or post-metaphysical era in which the order of the world disintegrates (*Ordnungsschwund*) more and more? And how does one assert oneself (*Selbstbehauptung*) amidst the doubt arising from a more and more uncertain human reality? In the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, in which Blumenberg discusses the conditions of the formation of the Modern Age (*Neuzeit*) he addresses these questions in great detail under the programmatic heading "Theological Absolutism and Human Self-Assertion" (*Theologischer Absolutismus und humane Selbstbehauptung*).<sup>19</sup> In his detailed overview of how human self-assertion arose, he systematically compares *Epochenkrisen* ("crises of [different] eras") from antiquity and the Middle Ages. In this analysis, Epicurean atomism and its reception in the early modern period is of pivotal importance for Blumenberg's argument. According to him, there is a "structural connection between nominalism as a late-medieval phenomenon and atomism as an early modern one."<sup>20</sup> By reformulating atomistic principles and comparing them to nominalism, Blumenberg makes clear why Epicureanism in this context is of such great importance: Epicurean atomism must be understood as a system arising from and representing an *Epochenkrise* in antiquity, and it thereby helps to outline the structure of the modern *Epochenkrise* between the Middle Ages and the modern age.

Epicureanism in the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* also serves to establish a key feature of Blumenberg's philosophy, namely "theoretical curiosity" (*theoretische Neugierde*).<sup>21</sup> In his historical summary of the

concept of curiosity from antiquity to the early modern period (which also contains shorter references to Platonism<sup>22</sup> and Stoicism), Blumenberg deals extensively with the “Indifference of Epicurus’s Gods” (*Die Gleichgültigkeit der Götter Epikurs*), contending that in Epicureanism any kind of curiosity which predisposes one toward negative emotions like fear or hope, was removed by the Epicureans’ multiple explanations of natural phenomena.<sup>23</sup>

The appetite for knowledge (*Wissbegierde*) restricts itself, by stopping short of deciding between the hypothetical alternatives, and thus saving itself, through ataraxia, from the disappointment of the desire for definitive knowledge (*definitives Wissenwollen*).<sup>24</sup>

The fact that Blumenberg takes this “negative” outcome of the (reconstruction of the) Epicurean anti-*curiositas* into account, as well, reveals both his aim of giving a comprehensive account of the *Ideengeschichte* of the concept of curiosity, and the broadly phenomenological approach underlying his survey.

Supplementing the more “technical” and “structural” aspects of Epicurean atomism already sketched out for the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, a further concern of Blumenberg’s philosophy comes to the fore in *Cave Exits*—his interest in metaphors. In this work, a comprehensive discussion of the (reception of the) Platonic *Allegory of the Cave*, Blumenberg is inclined to call atomism the “absolute metaphor (*absolute Metapher*) [...] of the equality of all men under chance.”<sup>25</sup> According to Blumenberg, metaphors do not simply serve as rhetorical ornaments: as absolute metaphors they are also “*fundamental elements* of philosophical language, ‘transliterations’ that resist being converted back into authenticity and logicity.”<sup>26</sup> Absolute metaphors have the ability to express what cannot be grasped or replaced by (non-metaphorical) philosophical language or concepts. Thus, in referring to atomism as an absolute metaphor for equality, Blumenberg underlines that in Epicureanism equality is conceptualized in its most “radical” way, since it is not linked to categories such as justice (*Gerechtigkeit*) and injustice, but to chance (*Zufall*). According to Blumenberg, the underlying concept of freedom and *ataraxia* which results from this “neutralization of the world” (*Neutralisierung der Welt*)<sup>27</sup> can be linked to the concept of the absolute metaphor because the kind of justice Blumenberg refers to by means of



atomism would become incomprehensible without this reference. Furthermore, atomism as an absolute metaphor can be understood here as “metaphorical background”:

[M]etaphors ... do not need to appear as such in the lexical sphere of expression; but a collection of statements suddenly coalesces into a meaningful unity if the leading metaphorical representation from which these statements were “read off” can be hypothetically ascertained.<sup>28</sup>

While there is much more to be said about Blumenberg’s metaphorology, this brief review of *Cave Exits*—as well as our earlier glances at *Shipwreck with Spectator* and *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*—should give weight to the claim that Blumenberg’s references to Epicureanism are both numerous and diverse. He does not offer a uniform picture of Epicureanism by referring only to specific concepts or parts of its doctrine, nor does he mention Epicureanism only affirmatively in order to strengthen his own argument. Rather, as has been shown, Blumenberg substantially disagrees with Epicurean concepts and uses them as critical references for comparison. Beyond these different modes of reception, however, Epicureanism in Blumenberg’s œuvre also allows deeper insights into the epistemological foundations of antiquity and modernity.

## JACQUES DERRIDA

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From Blumenberg, we turn to a thinker who in many ways, both chronologically and philosophically, may be considered the high priest of postmodernism, Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). At first pass, Derrida’s engagement with Epicurus and Epicureanism may appear slight, particularly when contrasted with his well-known readings of Plato, such as “Plato’s Pharmacy,” his detailed consideration of the myth of the invention of writing in Plato’s *Phaedrus*.<sup>29</sup> In the first place, his extended, *explicit* treatment of Epicurus is largely confined to a single essay. General surveys of Derrida’s engagement with ancient philosophy, moreover, while noting his treatment of a broad range of Greek and Roman figures (including *inter alia* Lucretius, Cicero, and Plotinus), tend to leave Epicurus to the side in favor of earlier Greek thinkers.<sup>30</sup> Symptomatic of this phenomenon is

Michael Naas's recent chapter on "Derrida and Ancient Philosophy," which holds the additional—and revealing—parenthetical subtitle "(Plato and Aristotle)." Although fully aware of the broad range of Derrida's writing and interests, in his piece Naas not only limits himself to Plato and Aristotle but in fact argues that Plato—and, more specifically and restrictively, the *Phaedrus* myth of the invention of writing—"played a central and unparalleled role in Derrida's work from the beginning right up until the end."<sup>31</sup>

While Naas makes his case in a clear and convincing fashion—there is no denying the import of the *Phaedrus* for both "Plato's Pharmacy" and a range of other foundational texts from the late 1960s—reasons remain for probing Derrida's relationship to Epicureanism more deeply. In the first instance, Derrida himself asserts that "a few discreet signs suggest how much the Greek 'materialists' ... matter to me."<sup>32</sup> Moreover, as we shall see, Derrida not only engages directly with Epicurus (as well as Lucretius) but there are ways in which Derridean philosophy resonates clearly (and profoundly) with concerns of Epicureanism. That is, while there is little doubt that Derrida's explicit engagement with Plato far exceeds—at least in terms of sheer written pages—his direct attempts to write about and analyze Epicurean thought, there are reasons to think that Epicureanism can claim more than an ancillary position both in parsing Derrida's own thought and in comprehending its relationship to ancient philosophy.

Any consideration of Derrida's engagement with Epicureanism must focus above all on the essay "My Chances/*Mes Chances*: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies," which was delivered originally in October 1982 as the Weigert Lecture under the auspices of the Forum on Psychiatry and the Humanities.<sup>33</sup> This essay was subsequently published, together with a number of scholarly responses, as an edited volume entitled *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature*.<sup>34</sup> The context giving rise to the essay is important; for, as the title of the collection suggests, it weaves together the theme of chance with two others—psychoanalysis and literature. Indeed, given the nature of the event for which he prepared his remarks, we may conclude that Derrida was invited (implicitly or explicitly) to take a position on the connection between psychoanalysis and literature; and "chance," it turns out, is the vehicle for articulating this connection. This contextual background—concerned as it is

with psychoanalysis and literature—thus colors extensively the treatment of Epicureanism we find in the essay, which nevertheless remains Derrida’s most forthright confrontation with the philosophy of the Garden.

While it would certainly repay the effort to follow all the twists and turns of Derrida’s essay, such a project would involve re-tracing complex jumps from Epicurus and Lucretius to Edgar Allan Poe, Martin Heidegger, and Sigmund Freud. It is thus easier, if also a bit riskier, simply to hew closely to Derrida’s reading and understanding of Epicurus and Lucretius, which is—in many ways, if not all—the central move of the essay; for, in his attempt to link psychoanalysis and literature, Derrida turns to the theme of chance and language, a theme which takes him directly to the Lucretian *clinamen*, or swerve. As Derrida remarks in the opening gestures of the essay, the French phrase *destiner au hasard*—a phrase that, on any interpretation, involves ideas of both chance and delivery, or communication—“can ... have two syntaxes and therefore two meanings.”<sup>35</sup> On the one hand, *destiner au hasard* may connote the idea of abandoning oneself to chance; on the other, “it can also mean to destine something unwittingly, in a haphazard manner, *at random*.”<sup>36</sup> And Derrida immediately connects this structural ambiguity to the Lucretian *clinamen*.<sup>37</sup> For Derrida, as we shall see, the *clinamen* is not an Epicurean theoretical anomaly, an ill-conceived innovation postulated to account, at a physical level, for free will, but rather a clear forerunner of his own notion of the mark, or the trace.<sup>38</sup>

After providing an initial glimpse of his understanding of the *clinamen*—or at least its role in attempting to articulate a link between psychoanalysis and literature—Derrida returns to the theme of the swerve in the body of his essay. The swerve, as he explains it, serves a key role in the creation of various worlds, producing “the concentration of material (*systrophē*) that gives birth to the worlds and the things they contain.”<sup>39</sup> It does so, Derrida asserts (following the W. H. D. Rouse–M. F. Smith rendering of Lucretius), by allowing atoms to deviate from their otherwise rigid, downward movement, facilitating collisions and creation.<sup>40</sup> And the *systrophē* that results from the swerve provides a key figure for the remainder of Derrida’s essay. The *systrophē* is not simply a feature of Epicurean physics but a way of articulating and describing Derrida’s own discourse:

When I bring up the names of Epicurus and Lucretius here, a kind of *systrophē* takes place in my discourse. For Epicurus, condensation or density, the systrophic relief, is first of all the twisted entanglement and concentrated turn of atoms (mass, swarm, turbulence, downpour, herd) that produces the seeds of things, the *spermata*, the seminal multiplicity (inseminal or disseminal)... . What are the various and intersecting reasons for which I have provoked this Epicurean downpour?<sup>41</sup>

From here, Derrida suggests a variety of reasons for the presence of Epicureanism in his essay, but these reasons all essentially come down to one central idea—the atomist tradition anticipates his own notion of the mark.

As Derrida notes, in Lucretius atoms and letters are often denoted by the same word, *elementa*; and he links this back to the earlier use of the Greek term *stoicheion*. In particular, he comments that:

The indivisible element, the *atomos* ... is the *stoicheion*, a word designating the graphic thing as well as the mark, the letter, the trait, or the point.<sup>42</sup>

The key idea here seems to be that the atomist tradition, and Lucretius in particular, by acknowledging the ability of letters, like atoms, to recombine and form new words offers a particular window on the theme of language and chance. As we noted above, the *clinamen*, the swerve, is not simply a feature of Epicurean physics, but in Derrida's hands a way of articulating the play of ambiguity in language. The move to link letters to atoms—to see the creative power of atoms in letters but also to articulate the “swerviness” of language through a physical metaphor—in many ways anticipates the things that Derrida wishes to say about language himself.<sup>43</sup> Yet Derrida also, as he ultimately makes clear, wishes to distinguish himself, at least somewhat, from the atomist tradition: he contends that the ultimate element—what he calls the “mark” rather than the *stoicheion* or *elementum*—is in fact “divisible” rather than “indivisible” (*atomos*).<sup>44</sup> What he means by this statement is the claim that any letter or mark—to function as a mark—must be not fixed with an original meaning or elemental quality but rather inherently able to withdraw from its original context and “play” or function in new ones. For Derrida, the mark contrasts with the *elementum* in being originally contextual, not an origin or a building block but a figure inherently at variance with itself.

In sum, then, “My Chances/*Mes chances*”—while it is only one essay in Derrida's vast *œuvre*—offers a glimpse of why Derrida would

retrospectively observe that the Greek materialists mattered so much to him. This one essay suggests that—in the realm of language, the realm, that is, where Derrida arguably attained his greatest prominence as a philosopher—the French philosopher saw Epicurus and Lucretius as allies and forebears. Even if he takes care to distance himself from certain elements of atomist thought, Derrida’s acknowledged proximity to Epicurean ideas of the *clinamen* and *elementum* makes such distancing appear relatively limited. Moreover—and this remark can only point to terrain for future investigation—it seems that there is a large number of other areas where there are resonances between deconstructive ideas and those of Epicureanism. For example, it has recently been argued forcefully—and with attention to Derrida’s entire œuvre—that Derrida’s philosophy is founded upon a profound atheism.<sup>45</sup> While Epicureanism is not an avowedly atheistic philosophy, it is structurally so in that it removes the gods from any active participation in the world; and of course, it has often—both in antiquity and afterwards—been read precisely as an atheistic school of thought. Additionally, Derrida gave the theme of friendship extensive treatment in his œuvre, most notably in *The Politics of Friendship*;<sup>46</sup> and friendship is of course also a prominent theme in Epicurean thought. While Derrida does not tackle Epicureanism in his most extended discussions of friendship—referring more often to Cicero, Aristotle, Montaigne, and Nietzsche—this theme adds to a burgeoning dossier that suggests the most postmodern thinker of all had more than a few things in common with the Garden.

## MICHEL SERRES

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We turn now to another French thinker, one who is often seen as standing outside the main currents of postmodernism or any other school, Michel Serres (1930–2019). Yet whatever his intellectual affiliations, Serres’s interest in Epicureanism is undeniable. And in the first instance, “Epicureanism” in Michel Serres’s œuvre means *Lucretian* Epicureanism. This fact is particularly obvious in Serres’s *The Birth of Physics*,<sup>47</sup> which provides the most comprehensive insight into the aims and methods of his reception of Epicurean concepts. Thus, in what follows, *The Birth of Physics* will be of undeniable interest. Yet, in order to outline more clearly

Serres's philosophy in general, as well as his reception of Epicureanism in particular, we offer first a brief sketch of his intellectual (philosophical) background, above all his position in the field of twentieth-century French philosophy. Generally, one locates Serres's philosophy in the field of history of science and, with regard to his beginnings as pupil of Gaston Bachelard, of epistemology.<sup>48</sup> But Serres himself refuses to be assigned to a certain *Denkschule* or tradition, and, through his manifold œuvre, manages to elude a fixed position in the field of academic philosophy.<sup>49</sup> As Latour rightly points out, Serres is not a "Critique" philosopher since he is not focused on "founding knowledge, debunking beliefs, adjudicating territories, ruling opinions."<sup>50</sup>

In *The Birth of Physics*, we encounter many of the specifics both of Serres's style of writing and his philosophical *modus operandi*. Beginning with the title, one can already observe the center and starting point of his reception of Epicureanism: it is all about physics, the key concept of Epicurean thought and starting point for its ethics.<sup>51</sup> Serres writes:

The Lucretian text is a discourse on physics. Commentary, at once critique and translation, in general refuses to recognize this, avoiding the nature of things themselves and treating the knowledge it presents as that of an ignorant pre-history, it speaks instead of morality and religion, politics and freedom. It cuts Lucretius off from the world. The scholiast loathes the world.<sup>52</sup>

Hence, the predominant topic to which Serres refers again and again throughout his "Lucretian meditation"<sup>53</sup> is the development and formation of modern science, especially physics. As he "provocatively"<sup>54</sup> implies in the title of the French edition, its birthplace is Lucretius's *De rerum natura*. Serres argues that modern physics, especially mechanics, is determined in its history by a pre-assumed focus on solidity.<sup>55</sup> In *The Birth of Physics*, however, we see that this does not get the point: based upon a central concept of Epicurean physics in *De rerum natura*, the *clinamen*,<sup>56</sup> viz. "the minimum angle of formation of a vortex,"<sup>57</sup> Serres seeks to establish a forgotten (or neglected) paradigm of physics, which relies not on solidity but, on the contrary, on fluidity, as the subtitle of the French edition of *The Birth of Physics*, *fleuves et turbulences* ("flow and turbulence"), already hints.<sup>58</sup> Serres's Epicureanism, we can say up to this point, is aimed not



only to establish a new paradigm of science but also to (re-)establish Lucretius in the history of science:

We understood Lucretius' knowledge very poorly because we were the children of Plato and the Stoics. Because the fundamental facts of Epicurean nature remained marginal to traditional science... . And so we judged them irrelevant to the history of sciences.<sup>59</sup>

In what follows, we sketch more fully the most important aspects of this "Epicurean nature." Yet despite the above-mentioned focus on physics, Serres's preoccupation with Epicureanism does not elude but rather slides gradually into ethics.

Serres adopts the system of Epicurean physics quite comprehensively, i.e. he refers to atoms, void, the axiomatic principles, and their mechanisms. As already briefly outlined, the *clinamen* ("swerve"/"déclinaison") hence serves both as an argumentative and conceptual "epicenter" for Serres's innovative reading of the (history of) modern physics, since according to him, it is not an unscientific invention or a logical, mechanical, or physical absurdity at all.<sup>60</sup> Rather the *clinamen* is essential in establishing as an alternative to the "mechanics of solids" a "mechanics of fluids."<sup>61</sup> Throughout the Lucretian poem, the concept of fluid and turbulence represented most fundamentally in the *clinamen*, argues Serres, is always present as a subtext.<sup>62</sup> In establishing a "mechanics of fluids," that is a physics of fluids and turbulence, the *clinamen* gains its importance from the fact that it possesses a singular "initial force":

The *clinamen* is the smallest imaginable condition for the original formation of turbulence...  
. Atoms meet in and by turbulence.<sup>63</sup>

From a macrocosmic viewpoint which is introduced by Serres here, his specific interest in the Lucretian *clinamen* becomes particularly clear and, furthermore, reveals the underlying methodological and epistemological premises of *The Birth of Physics*. Serres is first of all concerned with the inherent paradoxes of Epicurean physics:

The physical theory of turbulence contains a paradox. Laminar flow, the figure of chaos, is at first sight a model of order. The atoms pour out in parallel, without mixing or sticking to each other. These preliminary rows are already a taxonomy, as the word itself indicates. Turbulence seems to introduce a disorder into this arrangement... . Disorder emerges from order.<sup>64</sup>



For Serres, the *clinamen*, a *nec plus quam minimum* is a phenomenon of threshold, first because it entails and at the same time destroys order and, second, because this “infinitesimal turbulence ... is also the passage from theory [i.e., the parallel fall of the atoms] to practice [i.e., *clinamen*-caused turbulence].”<sup>65</sup> This explanation, finally, is particularly worth mentioning since it shows how Serres deals with paradoxes: he tries not to solve them but to describe them as precisely as possible, and he thereby manages to explain the *clinamen* not (only) philosophically but also systematically.<sup>66</sup>

Epicurean physics, however, is in Serres’s system not only concerned with mechanics, fluids, and materialism, but also serves as a predicate for ethics and epistemology:

Morality is physics. An exact knowledge of natural things. So it is not surprising that right in the middle of the treatise on atoms, there intervenes a treatise on the soul. It [viz. the soul] is mortal ... . It knows all the same, this is the point. And this exception must be reduced. Hence the book of perception and simulacra ...<sup>67</sup>

and “all gnoseology (*gnoséologie*) is physics.”<sup>68</sup> The theory of simulacra or *eidōla* (*Ep. Hdt.* 46–48), then, is mentioned by Serres in order to reformulate his critique on modern science and epistemology from a different angle: the (Post-)Cartesian “contact” to the world, underpinned by its scepticism against sensory perception,<sup>69</sup> can be replaced by the “theory of simulacra ... a theory of communication.”<sup>70</sup> The simulacra provide a theory of knowledge which is based on (physical) contact (cf. the “theory of communication”). For Serres, this fact ultimately blurs the lines between knowledge and being; it is effectively his “materialistic proof” of the Cartesian *cogito*.

Serres’s Epicurean ethics, finally, is based on the concepts of *ataraxia* and *hēdonē*. Here, we encounter a slight change in Serres’s handling of Epicureanism, since he is exclusively focused no longer on the specific *Lucretian* mode of Epicureanism but now on more general concepts of Epicureanism. In his strictly “physical” interpretation of Epicurean ethics, Serres relates *ataraxia* and *hēdonē* to physics: “Physics dictates morality.”<sup>71</sup> *Ataraxia* is therefore the complete absence of disturbance and turbulence,<sup>72</sup> whereas *hēdonē* (according to Serres’s etymological explanation) “is torn from the *dinē* [whirlpool]”<sup>73</sup> and thus points to these very movements of turmoil. The underlying pattern of ethics which becomes visible right from

the two concepts of *ataraxia* and *dinē* is thus all about equilibrium.<sup>74</sup> The little that disturbs this “equation”<sup>75</sup> brings us back to the *clinamen*, which for Serres is not only a physical but also an ethical phenomenon.<sup>76</sup>

Serres thus follows Epicurean doctrine closely but emphasizes its elements in a different manner than many modern scholars. With regard to the reception of Epicureanism in the twentieth century, it is not surprising that his whole argument is based on the *clinamen*, which (as we have seen) also attracted the attention of Derrida.<sup>77</sup> What is surprising, though, is his almost total neglect of its otherwise mentioned ethical implications: free will, which is often seen precisely as finding its starting point in the *clinamen*, does not play a decisive role in *The Birth of Physics* as such. Instead:

[The] wise man in accordance with nature controls himself by [the laws of nature]. If he understands physics, he conduces himself morally.<sup>78</sup>

This makes clear once again the way in which Epicureanism has influenced Serres’s mode of thinking: first, he seeks to establish a link between philosophy and science by reading Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* as a philosophical treatise not on ethics but on science—a different, paradoxical science. Second, Serres’s Epicurean ethics seeks to stress a materialist ethics; that is, it tends to give prior position to the materialist fundamentals of Epicurean physics. In this way, Serres’s reception adds to this focus on the promulgation of the scientific character of Epicureanism an ethical or even advisory dimension when he states:

The Epicureans criticized science as we would today. Not all science, not science as such, but that science or that reasoning which attracts or follows force, mastery and domination on its paths of totalization... . We, people of the totalitarian age of the universal and the university, have paid dearly to learn what the Epicureans were not wrong to fear.<sup>79</sup>

This statement reveals that according to Serres Epicureanism is not only a historical phenomenon but rather a mode of thinking about science and ethics that still affects, or at least should affect, the present.

## CONCLUSION

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This review of three thinkers—one German, two French—offers but one limited laboratory for investigating the fate of Epicureanism in the postmodern age, yet it perhaps allows us some basis for returning to the question from which we began: is there a postmodern Epicureanism, in the strong, thematic sense of that term?

On the one hand, while there is no denying that each of the figures considered here engages deeply with Epicureanism, it may seem that they do so only in a piecemeal fashion. Blumenberg, for example, uses Epicureanism largely as an analytical tool for defining, e.g., past epochs rather than as a body of thought to be embraced wholesale. Likewise, Derrida and Serres seem to overemphasize the *clinamen*, or swerve, at the expense of other elements in Epicurean thought. Such remarks perhaps give heft to Fowler's assertion that the Epicureans are not postmodern, or at least suggest that postmodern Epicureanism is a fragmentary Epicureanism, which no longer attempts to present the ideas of the ancient school in a comprehensive fashion.

Yet one may surely view this fragmentation more positively. The *clinamen*, or swerve, seems especially to have spoken to several postmodern thinkers. While it is often treated as a logical anomaly and philosophical embarrassment by opponents of the school, for an era that had abandoned hope in grand narratives the swerve's very status as a contradiction could hardly but seem appealing. As we have seen, Derrida—by any measure a postmodern—saw many of the elements of his own attitude towards writing embedded in the swerve and in atomist thought on language more generally. And while none of this analysis means that the swerve or Epicureanism is inherently postmodern, Epicureanism clearly provided key conceptual resources for the articulation of postmodernism. Indeed, even if the term postmodern Epicureanism still, after so many pages of discussion and analysis, evokes a specter of paradox, perhaps that very specter—a marker of the challenge of digesting and incorporating such a resolutely anti-sceptical body of thought—is what made Epicureanism so appealing for so many postmodern thinkers.

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<sup>1</sup> Fowler, “Epicurean Anger,” 35. Fowler produced many valuable essays on Epicurean thought, yet—even among these—Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion* (a work whose origins date back to the early 1980s) stands out as an invaluable resource for coming to grips with Lucretius’s position on the *clinamen*, or atomic swerve.

<sup>2</sup> *Inter alia*, Fowler, *Roman Constructions* makes its engagement with postmodern thought explicit: its subtitle is *Readings in Postmodern Latin*.

<sup>3</sup> The bibliography discussing, defining, and problematizing postmodernism is vast, but two central texts, by any measure, are Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (translated into English as *The Postmodern Condition*) and Jameson, *Postmodernism*. For a link to scepticism, at least in a limited sense, see, e.g., Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiv: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.”

<sup>4</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.83. See, *inter alia*, Lucr. 4.469–77 for a standard Epicurean attack on scepticism (with regard to the reliability of sense perception).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Jameson, *Postmodernism*, ix–xii, which repeatedly defines postmodernism by contrast with modernism, as of course the very term “postmodernism” does itself.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth pointing out that these three figures in no way exhaust the philosophically significant engagements with Epicurus in the second half of the twentieth century. Among others, Gilles Deleuze was clearly fascinated by Lucretius and deserves to be included in any list of postmodern thinkers of Epicureanism. For a detailed study of Deleuze’s engagement with Lucretius, see Holmes, “Deleuze, Lucretius, and the Simulacrum of Naturalism.”

<sup>7</sup> Trans. Rendall, *Shipwreck with Spectator*.

<sup>8</sup> More generally, the presence of antiquity in Blumenberg’s œuvre has earned only limited attention before recent times. But see now Möller, *Prometheus gibt nicht auf*, who for the first time tries to decipher systematically Blumenberg’s *Antikebild*.

<sup>9</sup> Trans. Wallace, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*.

<sup>10</sup> Not translated into English; translations are by Eva Marie Noller.

<sup>11</sup> It is surprising, though, that in Blumenberg’s *Work on Myth* (“Arbeit am Mythos”), Epicurus is not of pivotal importance. For a study of Blumenberg’s theory of myth, see now Nicholls, *Myth and the Human Sciences*.

<sup>12</sup> See Haverkamp, “Paradigma Metapher, Metapher Paradigma.”

<sup>13</sup> In their introduction to a glossary to Blumenberg, Robert Buch and Daniel Weidner, *Blumenberg lesen*, 15 call Blumenberg’s books “Meilensteine, aber auch Monolithe” (“milestones but monoliths at the same time”). On the imposing nature of Blumenberg’s works, see, too, Odo Marquard’s remark (“Hans Blumenberg,” 25): “[L]ife is short. Yet Hans Blumenberg’s books are generally long, and at times extremely long.”

<sup>14</sup> The text of Lucretius is cited here according to the edition of Munro, *Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*. A literal rendering of the lines runs: “Sweet it is, when winds buffet the waters upon the great sea, to look upon the great toil of another from the shore.”

<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive and subtle analysis of Blumenberg’s reading of the Lucretian proem, see Möller, “Schiffbruch ohne Zuschauer?,” 125–40.

<sup>16</sup> For discussion of this passage and its import for Epicurean psychology, see Konstan, *A Life Worthy of the Gods*, 29–35.

<sup>17</sup> Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> On the importance of gazing in this context and in Blumenberg’s philosophy in general, see Möller, “Schiffbruch ohne Zuschauer?,” 125–40 and “Zuschauer.” On gazing in Lucretius, see De Lacy, “Distant Views”; and Hardie, “Lucretian Visions in Virgil.”

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 125–203. Interestingly, Blumenberg thereby refers extensively to Marx’s dissertation on the *Differenz der demokratischen und epikuräischen Naturphilosophie nebst einem Anhang*. For Marx’s reception of Epicureanism see Porter in this volume.

<sup>20</sup> Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 151.

<sup>21</sup> Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 232: “From a central affect of consciousness there arises in the modern age an indissoluble connecting link between man’s historical self-understanding and the realization of scientific knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) as the confirmation of the claim to unrestricted theoretical curiosity.”

<sup>22</sup> For Blumenberg’s discussion of Plato, cf. Niehues-Pröbsting, “Die Höhle und ihr Schatten”; and Section I in Möller, *Prometheus gibt nicht auf*, which deals with *Hans Blumenbergs Platonlektüren*.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 263–68. For a survey of the “Logic of Multiple Explanations” in Epicureanism see Hankinson, “Lucretius, Epicurus, and the Logic of Multiple Explanations.”

<sup>24</sup> Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 265.

<sup>25</sup> Blumenberg, *Höhlenausgänge*, 335.

<sup>26</sup> Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, 3; original emphasis.

<sup>27</sup> Blumenberg, *Höhlenausgänge*, 355.

<sup>28</sup> Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> “Plato’s Pharmacy,” originally published in two volumes of *Tel Quel* in 1967 and 1968, first reappeared as part of Derrida, *La Dissemination* and then was translated into English at Derrida, *Dissemination*, 61–171.

<sup>30</sup> Derrida himself concedes that his work has “‘privileged in many ways’ the Platonic corpus” (Derrida, “We Other Greeks,” 34). (The words in single quotation marks are those of Francis Wolff.)

<sup>31</sup> Naas, “Derrida and Ancient Philosophy,” 231. Note also that in the recent *Derrida and Antiquity*, Epicurus appears only once by name (Leonard, *Derrida and Antiquity*, 391).

<sup>32</sup> Derrida, “We Other Greeks,” 34.

<sup>33</sup> For the original context of Derrida’s piece, see Smith and Kerrigan, *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature*, vii.

<sup>34</sup> Smith and Kerrigan, *Taking Chances*.

<sup>35</sup> Derrida, “My Chances/*Mes chances*,” 347.

<sup>36</sup> Derrida, “My Chances/*Mes chances*,” 347.

<sup>37</sup> Derrida acknowledges that the ambiguity he identifies may depend “on the context” but also that “a context is never sufficiently determined to prohibit all random deviation” (Derrida, “My



Chances/*Mes chances*,” 347). In other words, the ambiguity offers a structural problem that wants explanation rather than simply a phrase rendered ambiguous by a lack of context.

<sup>38</sup> Here is not the place to address all the different scholarly interpretation of Lucretius’s *clinamen*: Derrida does not address them himself, and he seems content to use it largely as a figure for characterizing the action of chance in language. Further on the swerve, see Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, esp. 407–27, as well as the relevant parts of the lemma-by-lemma commentary on Lucretius; and Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1.107–12.

<sup>39</sup> Derrida, “My Chances/*Mes chances*,” 350.

<sup>40</sup> Derrida, in effect, summarizes Lucr. 2.216–24, as translated in the Rouse–Smith Loeb.

<sup>41</sup> Derrida, “My Chances/*Mes chances*,” 351.

<sup>42</sup> Derrida, “My Chances/*Mes chances*,” 351.

<sup>43</sup> See here, too, Shearin, *The Language of Atoms*, 17–45 (*passim*), where various connections between Derridean ideas on language and Epicurean linguistic theory are noted.

<sup>44</sup> See Derrida, “My Chances/*Mes chances*,” 354, 360.

<sup>45</sup> Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*.

<sup>46</sup> Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*.

<sup>47</sup> The French edition, *La naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrèce*, appeared in 1977; we use the English translation by Hawkes: Serres, *Birth of Physics*.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Serres’s dissertation *Le système de Leibniz et ses modèles mathématiques* (1968).

<sup>49</sup> For a comprehensive and acute overview of Michel Serres’s philosophy in the context of contemporary French philosophy, cf. Latour, “The Enlightenment without the Critique.” In an interview with Latour, which serves as excellent introduction to Serres’s philosophy, Serres (Latour and Serres, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, 9) summarizes his intellectual formation as follows: “What contemporary author have I followed? None, alas... . Epistemology seemed to me to develop empty commentaries. Phenomenology didn’t interest me either for reasons of taste and economy... . [A]lthough I went through the best schools, I became, in the end, a self-taught man.”

<sup>50</sup> Latour, “The Enlightenment without the Critique,” 85.

<sup>51</sup> See Asmis, “Lucretius’ New World Order,” 141; and Webb, “Michel Serres on Lucretius,” 132; *contra* Warren, “Ancient Atomists on the Plurality of Worlds,” 358: “[A]lthough Epicurus will on occasion refer to his physical theory to bolster particular ethical claims [...], Epicurean ethical theory is not, so to speak, deduced from Epicurean physics or cosmology.”

<sup>52</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 107.

<sup>53</sup> Berressem, “*Incerto Tempore Incertisque Locis*,” 56.

<sup>54</sup> Webb, “Introduction,” vii.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*; and Schmidt, *Clinamen* provide a detailed analysis of the “theory” and “practice” of the Lucretian *clinamen*.

<sup>57</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 11 and esp. 17–18. Holmes, “Deleuze, Lucretius, and the Simulacrum of Naturalism,” 320 states that the “Epicurean *clinamen* became a potent, if multivalent, figure for a number of French philosophers” and hereby emphasizes that “the most important intervention in this tradition has been Michel Serres’s *The Birth of Physics*, a forceful defense of Lucretius relevance to post-Newtonian physics.” For a more detailed discussion of Serres’s concept of the *clinamen*, see Noller, “De la théorie à la pratique.”

<sup>59</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 112. For the general concept of history which plays a decisive role as “physics” (Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 179) in *The Birth of Physics*, cf. Clucas, “Liquid History,” esp.

77–83.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 3.

<sup>61</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 5. In this context one has briefly to point out Serres's fascination for Archimedes, the "Euclid of the Epicurean world" (Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 24). To him, Serres dedicates a chapter in his book to strengthening his assumption of a serious contribution of Epicureanism to science in antiquity: "We can no longer read the atomist physics as a naive phenomenology of things, it has rigorous support. Or rather, a well-formed *analogon*. It begins with Democritus, and the edifice is completed, crowned, by Archimedes. A mathematical physics, close to the world and proven, in fact existed among the Greeks who were not supposed to have one." (Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 25.) The Epicurean physics, thus, has its analogue in Archimedean mathematics.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 110–11: "In the beginning we were warned: maritime turbulence, admired in bad weather from the land, only agitates fluids, waters and winds: *turbantibus aequora ventis*. In the theoretical text, reference to singular bodies is directed only at fluids: *imbris uti guttae*, like drops of water, *per aquas atque aera rarum*, through water or the rare medium of the air and, again, *corpus aquae naturaque tenuis aeris*."

<sup>63</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 6.

<sup>64</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 27.

<sup>65</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 83; original emphasis and my addition.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Latour, "The Enlightenment without the Critique," 91: "Serres never overcomes anything. Serres's philosophy is free from negation."

<sup>67</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 105.

<sup>69</sup> For a more explicit account of Serres's attack against Rationalism see the preface to *Les cinq sens*.

<sup>70</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 106.

<sup>71</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 182.

<sup>72</sup> See Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 127: "Ataraxy, a moral state, is thus a physical state, without deviation or distance."

<sup>73</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 182.

<sup>74</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 183 bases his argument on *DRN* 5.1117–18: *vivere parce / aequo animo*: "The equation is paradoxical, it operates a slight deviation... . To the right, on the side of the *aequo animo*, this is the zero of equilibration, it is the equanimity without flaw ... : repose. To the left, on the side of the *vivere parce*, here is a small amount of parsimony. How can this part ... be reduced to zero?"

<sup>75</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 183.

<sup>76</sup> For a comprehensive survey of Serres's "Epicurean" ethics see Webb, "Michel Serres on Lucretius. Atomism, Science, and Ethics," esp. 132–35.

<sup>77</sup> Cf., too, [the previous section](#) on Derrida.

<sup>78</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 185.

<sup>79</sup> Serres, *Birth of Physics*, 191.

# INDEX

.....

- Abba Shaul [554](#)
- About the Criterion* (Epicurus) [43](#) *see also* *Canon* (Epicurus)
- absolute metaphors of Blumenberg [795–796](#)
- abstract concept of value [125–126](#), [129](#)
- Academica* (Cicero) [480–482](#)
- Achilles [473](#)
- actions
- feelings prompting [212](#)
  - freedom of [236–243](#)
  - necessary or “through ourselves” [234–235](#)
- Acts of the Apostles [582–584](#), [586](#), [591](#)
- Adams, John [733](#), [734](#), [737](#), [740](#)
- Adriani, Marcello [629](#)
- Adversus Colotes* (Plutarch) [50–51](#), [508–511](#), [526](#)
- philosophers, attacks on [518–522](#)
  - on political leaders [562](#)
- Aeneid* (Vergil) [472–473](#), [499](#)
- Aenesidemus [482](#)
- Aetna* (Anonymous) [101](#), [108](#)
- afterlife, *see* [life after death](#)
- Against Colotes* (Plutarch), *see* [Adversum Colotem](#) (Plutarch)
- Against Craterus’s Refutation of “Demonstrations of Geometry”* (Zeno of Sidon) [382](#)
- Against Empedocles* (Hermarchus) [438](#)
- air, Seneca on [491–492](#)
- Akiva (Rabbi) [554](#), [557](#)
- Aldus Manutius [624](#)
- Alexander, military strategist [125–126](#), [129](#)
- Alexander Magnus [413](#)
- Allen, Walter [385](#)
- Almanach des gourmands* (La Reynière) [722](#)
- altruism [180](#), [252](#), [262–263](#), [479](#), [538](#), [699](#)
- ambition [433](#)
- Ambrose [599–601](#), [604](#)
- Amoraitic materials [552](#), [560–566](#)
- Anaxagoras [369](#), [437](#)

Anaxarchus of Abdera [413](#)  
Angeli, Anna [388](#), [402](#), [416](#)  
anger [209](#), [211](#), [409](#), [472–473](#)  
*Anima mundi* (Blount) [652](#)  
animals  
  minds of [193–194](#), [208–209](#)  
  motion of [212](#), [241–242](#)  
  natures of [214–216](#), [437](#)  
  spirits or souls of [650](#), [651](#), [653](#), [681](#)  
  training [218](#)  
Annas, Julia [274](#)  
Anniceris [142](#), [161–162](#), [175](#)  
*antanaplērōsis* [98](#)  
anti-reductionism [224](#)  
anticipation, pleasure of [153](#), [158](#)  
*antimartyrēsis* [60–61](#), [105](#)  
*antiperistasis* [491](#)  
Antiphanes [36](#)  
antisemitism [536](#), [543–544](#)  
Antisthenes [141](#)  
*apatheia* [471](#)  
Apiqoros [549–551](#), [579–580](#)  
  Maimonides on [556](#)  
  see also [Rabbinic literature and Epicureanism](#)  
*apiqorsut* [577–579](#)  
apokatastasis of the Stoics [585](#), [592](#)  
Apollodorus [22](#)  
Apollonius [372](#)  
Apollophanes [389](#)  
*Apology* (Plato) [736](#)  
*aponia* [158](#) see also [painlessness](#)  
Appleby, Joyce [740](#)  
Aratus of Soli [108](#)  
Arcesilaus [21](#), [519–520](#)  
*Argonautica* (Apollonius) [372](#)  
Aristion [303](#)  
Aristippus of Cyrene [142](#)  
Aristippus the Younger [142](#), [151](#), [156](#)  
Aristo of Ceos [415](#), [416](#)  
Aristotle  
  atomic theory of [64](#), [65](#), [653](#)  
  Cicero's opinion of [485](#)  
  elements of [90–91](#)  
  friendships of [280](#)  
  generally accepted beliefs for [47–48](#)

on hedonism 141–142, 156  
Maimonides and 572, 574–576  
marriage, right age for 364–365  
on rhetoric 334  
and the soul 55, 191  
space, nature of 70–71, 74  
theology of 95, 98, 574–575  
*see also* specific writings of  
Armstrong, David 278, 343, 369, 403  
Arnobius 598  
Arrighetti, Graziano 314, 349, 588  
arrogance 297, 415–416  
*Ars Poetica* (Horace) 456  
Artemidorus 389  
Asmis, Elizabeth 349, 353, 366, 473  
associationists 268, 271  
astral theology 107  
*Astronomica* (Manilius) 108  
*ataraxia* 158, 263, 432, 443, 471  
    Blumenberg on 795–796  
    gods and 587  
    Marx on 775, 776, 780  
    poetry and 349, 442  
    Serres on 803–804  
atheism of Epicurus, charges of 7, 95–96, 481, 539  
    in early Christianity 586, 587–588, 591, 594  
Athenian Plague 434–435, 450, 616  
atomism 6, 59–80, 643–650  
    Blumenberg on 794–795  
    Cicero on 480–481  
    and cosmology 90–91  
    criticism of by Plutarch 514  
    Derrida on 798, 799  
    described 61–63  
    early Christianity and 585, 591–593, 595, 603, 643–644  
    in the eighteenth century 643–650  
    and hedonism 142–143  
    Hegel on 763–768  
    and infinity 70–71  
    Maimonides and 571–573  
    Marx on 771–773, 775–779  
    minima of 63–67, 69–70  
    minimal parts of 63–67, 69–70  
    movement of 61–62, 71–73, 238  
    and the not strictly infinite 67–70

- and poetics, similarity to 369, 370
- primary and secondary qualities of 76–77
- resistance and 60
- and self-development 214–218, 229–230
- Seneca on 491
- sense perception and 76–77
- sentience of atoms 649
- simplicity of 77
- and thought 196, 198–199
- and void 60–62, 201
- weight and 60, 71–75
- see also* *swerve*, *atomic*
- attention, paying or not paying 202, 203, 212
- attestation in sense perception 53–54
- Atticus 112
- Augustine 203, 604
- Aurispa, Giovanni 616, 621
- autarkeia* 589
- autonomy 263

- Babylonian Talmud 560–561
- Bachelard, Gaston 800
- Bailey, Cyril 367
- Balzac, Honoré de 726
- Bar Kepha, Moses 592–593
- Barbaro, Francesco 621
- Bardaisan of Edessa 591–596, 603
- Barère, Bertrand de Vieuzac 713
- Barhadbshabba 593
- Basil of Nyssa 602
- Basilides of Tyrus 22
- Bassus, Aufidius 489, 501–502
- Bauer, Bruno 762
- Baxter, Richard 647
- Bayle, Pierre 647–649, 660
- beliefs 199–203
  - and feelings 204, 208–210
  - and focusing the mind 231–232
  - not perceivable 200–201
  - perceivable 200
- Bendlin, Andreas 537, 539, 540
- Benitez, Miguel 656
- Bentham, Jeremy 743, 744
  - egoistic hedonism and 755
  - on happiness 747–748

on pain, absence of [753](#)  
on pleasure [746–748](#)  
Bentley, Richard [646, 657](#)  
Berchoux, Joseph [719–722, 726, 727](#)  
Bernier, François [644](#)  
Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom (Jefferson) [734](#)  
*Birth of Physics, The* (Serres) [800–804](#)  
*Birth of Tragedy, The* (Nietzsche) [782, 784, 785](#)  
Blank, David [344](#)  
blessedness of the divine [97–101, 109](#)  
Bloch, Herbert [394](#)  
Bloch, Olivier [644](#)  
Blount, Charles [652](#)  
Blumenberg, Hans [792–796, 805](#)  
absolute metaphors of [795–796](#)  
on atomism [794–795](#)  
*see also* specific writings of  
body [190–191, 194](#)  
and hedonism [142, 153–155, 160, 177–178](#)  
pleasures and pains of [205–207](#)  
properties of [201](#)  
Boethius [628](#)  
Boethus [510](#)  
*Book of the Laws of Countries* (Bardaisan) [592, 593, 596](#)  
Bourguet, Louis [660](#)  
Bowditch, P. L. [565](#)  
Boyancé, Pierre [348](#)  
Boyle, Robert [644, 646](#)  
Bromius [36](#)  
Brown, Eric [697](#)  
Brown, Stuart [649](#)  
Brucker, Jakob [656](#)  
Bruni, Leonardo [616–617](#)  
Bruno, Giordano [634](#)  
*Bucolics* (Vergil) [459](#)  
Buffon [659–660, 663](#)  
Burley, Walter [621](#)

Cabanis, Pierre-Jean-Georges [663](#)  
Cabisius, Gail [449](#)  
Callimachus [441, 442](#)  
Callisthenes of Olynthus [413](#)  
Calpurnii Pisones [401](#)  
Calvinists and Thomas Jefferson [734–735](#)  
*Canon* (Epicurus) [43, 44, 52](#)



- canon of philosophical schools 32–33
- Capece, Scipione 631–633
- cardiocentrism 684–686
- Carmina* (Horace) 465
- Carneades 516
- Carneiscus 21
- Carpe Diem* (Horace) 465–466
- Casanova, Angelo 546
- Cassius 477, 482, 483
- Catullus 447
- causes 233, 235
- Cavallo, Guglielmo 404, 410, 413, 416, 417, 420
  - Villa of the Papyri and 394, 398, 403, 406, 407
- Cave Exits* (Blumenberg) 793, 795, 796
- Cavendish, Charles 678
- Cavendish, Margaret 647
- celestial bodies, divinity of 89–90, 107–108, *see also* universe
- Celsus 591, 596–597
- Cerebri anatome* (Willis) 651
- chance, concept of 592–595
- Chandler, Clive 355
- Characters* (Theophrastus) 414
- Charleton, Walter
  - on atoms 647, 649–650
  - on the soul 650
- Chazet, René 716–719, 726, 727
- Chilton, W. 546
- Chion of Heraclea 542
- Christianity and Epicureanism 94–95, 256–257, 572–573, 582–612
  - Ambrose 599–601, 604
  - atomism and 584, 591–593, 595, 603
  - chance, concept of 592–595
  - Dionysius of Alexandria 597–598
  - Gregory of Nyssa 601–602
  - heresies of 591
  - Jerome 603–604
  - Lactantius 598–599
  - on life after death 740
  - New Testament and Epicureanism 582–584
  - Nietzsche on 787
  - Origen on 585, 590–591, 595–598
  - paganism, charges of 590, 591
  - Paul, the apostle 582–586, 589, 591, 594, 604
  - Rufinus 603
- Chrysippus 479, 508, 536, 590

Cicero [199](#), [405](#), [447](#), [476–485](#), [499](#)  
     criticism of Epicureanism [172–183](#), [476](#), [483](#), [519](#)  
     and Epicurus, opinions of [477](#), [479](#), [484–485](#), [561](#)  
     on ethics [478–480](#)  
     on feelings [204](#)  
     on friendship [261](#), [263–272](#), [281](#), [479–480](#)  
     and the gods [97](#), [99](#), [111](#), [481](#), [484](#), [586](#), [598–599](#)  
     and humanists [619](#), [625](#)  
     and Lucretius [482](#)  
     on the mind [201](#)  
     on Philodemus of Gadara [384–387](#), [476](#), [482–483](#)  
     on physics [480–481](#)  
     on politics [288](#), [484](#)  
     and Roman Epicureans [481–485](#)  
     on the shape of the universe [83](#)  
     Thomas Jefferson and [730–732](#)  
     in Victorian England [743](#)  
     see also [Torquatus](#); specific writings of  
 Cichorius, Conrad [386](#), [389](#)  
 Clay, Diskin [531](#), [535](#), [539](#), [541](#), [543](#)  
 Cleanthes [179](#), [536](#), [584](#)  
 Clement of Alexandria [94](#), [95](#), [538](#), [594–596](#), [600](#)  
 Cleomedes [85](#)  
*clinamen* [222](#), [240](#), [436](#), [481](#), [483](#)  
     Derrida on [798](#), [799](#)  
     Serres on [801–805](#)  
     see also [swerve](#), [atomic](#)  
 clouds [87–88](#)  
 Clucas, Stephen [645](#)  
 cognitive therapy [131](#), [134](#)  
*Collection of Philosophers* (Philodemus) [14](#), [26](#)  
 Colotes of Lampsacus [21](#), [50–51](#), [294](#), [508](#), [522](#)  
     citing of Epicurean works [512–513](#)  
     Democritus and [519–521](#)  
     language investigations of [317](#)  
     Plutarch's case studies on [518–522](#)  
     and poetics [348](#), [355–357](#), [373](#)  
     in refuting others [517–518](#)  
     see also [Adversus Colotem](#) (Plutarch)  
*Commentary on the Mishnah* (Maimonides) [566–567](#), [569](#), [570](#), [577](#)  
 common perceptions [54](#)  
 Common Sense of Sidgwick [752](#)  
*Comparatio Cimonis et Luculli* (Plutarch) [508](#)  
 Comparetti, Domenico [392–394](#), [397](#), [416](#), [418–419](#)  
 Concolino Mancini, Bianca [356](#)

concrete concept of value 125–126, 129  
connectionists 268  
contestation in sense perception 53–54  
*Continuation des pensées diverses* (Bayle) 648  
*Contra Celsum* (Origen) 595  
contract 4, 692–695  
    social 674–675  
conventionalist stage of language 324  
corpuscular physics 657  
Corvinus, Matthias (King of Hungary) 622, 624  
Cosimo de Medici 621–622  
cosmological traditions 592, 593  
cosmology 6, 81–87, 99  
    motions in the universe 84–87, 90–92  
    place of the gods 89–90  
    of the Stoics 584–585  
cosmopolitanism 538  
cosmos, *see* universe  
Costabile, Felice 397–398  
Cosway, Maria 731  
courage 169  
Coward, William 653, 654  
Cradle Argument on pleasure and pain 146–149  
    objections to 172–173  
Crates of Mallos 361–362  
*Cratylus* (Plato) 327  
criteria 44–52, 696  
    Hellenistic use of term 44  
    sense perception 44–46, 146  
criteria for truth, Epicurus's 52, 103, 105  
    feelings of pleasure or pain 48, 157–158  
    preconceptions 46–48, 310–311  
Croesus 540  
Crönert, Wilhelm 348  
Cudworth, Ralph 642, 645–646, 648, 657, 660  
Cyrenaics 154, 169–171  
    criticism of Epicurean hedonism 7, 175, 178  
    friendships of 280  
    hedonism of 141–142, 151–153, 156, 157, 163, 166  
    in Horace 469  
  
*De amicitia* (Cicero) 480  
*De amore prolis* (Plutarch) 511, 512  
*De anima brutorum* (Willis) 650, 651, 653  
*De appetitu et affectibus animae* (Gassendi) 685

*De beneficiis* (Seneca) 492–493  
*De cive* (Hobbes) 690, 699, 700, 702  
*De cohibenda ira* (Plutarch) 517  
*De Deo* (Raphson) 654  
*De diis* (Philodemus) 105, 106  
*De finibus bonorum et malorum* (Cicero) 144–147, 172, 352, 477  
     atomism in 480–481  
     egoism in 483  
     on friendship 261, 263–272, 276, 495  
     Lucretius in 482  
     pleasure in 478–479  
     in Victorian England 743  
*De ira dei* (Lactantius) 598  
 De Lacy, Estelle Allen 348, 419  
 De Lacy, Phillip Howard 348, 385, 419  
*De latenter vivendo* (Plutarch) 523–526  
*De legibus* (Cicero) 482  
 de Marolles, Michel 626  
*De motu, loco et tempore* (Hobbes) 679, 688  
*De motu cordis* (Harvey) 684  
*De natura deorum* (Cicero) 95, 99, 101, 482, 484  
*De officiis* (Cicero) 449, 480  
*De otio* (Seneca) 496, 497  
 De Petra, G. 392  
*De pietate* (Philodemus) 96  
*De Pythiae oraculis* (Plutarch) 510  
*De re publica* (Cicero) 480  
*De rerum natura* (Lucretius) 30, 81, 111, 113  
     annotation of 627–630  
     Athenian Plague in 434–435  
     atomism 449–451  
     atoms, used metaphorically in 444–445  
     contemporary readership of 445–451  
     death in 448–449  
     desire in 433  
     French Enlightenment and 714  
     and humanists of the Renaissance 615, 621–628, 631  
     on language 319–323  
     poetic form of 438–445  
     politics in 446–450  
     and postmodern Epicurus 793–794  
     religion in 432–433, 437, 442  
     Serres on 800, 801, 804  
     structure of 430–438  
     on swerve, atomic 222–223, 236–243, 245–246, 436

Vergil and [459](#)  
*De sera numinis vindicta* (Plutarch) [507](#)  
*De signis* (Philodemus) [380](#), [390](#)  
De Simone, Antonio [391](#)  
*De summo bono* (Valla) [619–620](#)  
*De superstitione* (Plutarch) [511](#)  
*De vita beata* (Seneca) [493](#)  
*De voluptate* (Valla) [619–620](#)  
death [7](#), [118–140](#), [545](#)  
    badness of [125–129](#)  
    fear of [118](#), [120](#), [122–124](#), [130–138](#), [211–212](#), [465–466](#)  
    fear of, lack of [98–99](#), [419](#), [544](#), [654–655](#)  
    implications of [136–138](#)  
    life after [77](#), [95](#), [118](#), [119](#), [124](#)  
    meaning of [121–122](#)  
    objections to Epicurean beliefs about [123–130](#)  
    Seneca on [501–502](#)  
    value of, Epicurean reasoning about [120–123](#)  
death penalty [136–137](#)  
Del Mastro, Gianluca [406](#), [412](#), [420](#)  
Delattre, Daniel [410](#)  
deliberative rhetoric [337](#)  
Demetrius Laco [23–24](#), [404](#), [520](#)  
    and the doctrine of the Garden [33](#)  
    language investigations of [323–327](#)  
    and poetics [349](#), [358–361](#), [373](#)  
    theology [105](#)  
democratic man [165–166](#)  
Democritus [484](#), [524](#), [538](#)  
    atomic theory of [59](#), [63–64](#), [213](#), [224](#), [238](#), [480–481](#), [774](#)  
    and Colotes [519–521](#)  
    and Marx [769–771](#), [773](#), [777](#)  
    and Nietzsche [780–781](#), [783](#)  
    on sense perception [43](#), [51–52](#)  
    soul atoms of [64](#)  
demonstrations and proofs [56](#)  
Demosthenes, C. Julius [532](#)  
deprivation argument about death [124](#), [127](#), [129](#)  
Derrida, Jacques [793](#), [796–800](#), [805](#)  
    on atomism [798](#), [799](#)  
    on gods [799–800](#)  
Descartes, René [645–647](#), [680](#)  
    religion of [648](#)  
desires  
    classification of [164–168](#), [211–212](#), [285–286](#)

- criticism of Epicurean hedonism 176–177
- Horace on 471
- for life 206
- psychic distress of 207–208
- vices and passions 167
- Deutsches Archäologisches Institute 545
- development, human 214–215, 228–231, 245
  - dependent on oneself 231
- DeWitt, Norman 582
- Dhanani, Alnoor 571
- d'Holbach, Paul Thiry 641, 657–658, 662–663
- Diderot, Denis 656–657, 660–663, 716
  - on Epicureans and Stoics 715
  - see also* specific writings of
- Diels, Hermann 369, 393
- dikaion* 692–693
- Dillon, Sheila 400
- Diogenes Laertius 509, 519, 537, 594
  - on hedonism of Epicurus 148, 162
  - and humanists of the Renaissance 621, 625–626
  - on poetry 352–353
  - on politics 525
  - on religion 463
  - on rhetoric 342
  - self-evident observations 104
  - traditional education and 334–335
  - and truth, criteria of 44–46
  - and writings of Epicurus 16, 17
  - see also* specific writings of
- Diogenes of Oenoanda 2–3, 31–32, 531–548
  - cosmology and 83
  - criticism of Epicureanism 175–176, 436
  - cultural context of 533–535
  - Epicurean texts and 536–537
  - on fear 202
  - fragments and recent discoveries 538–545
  - on hedonism 150–151, 153, 154, 157, 166–167
  - illness of 541
  - language investigations of 326–327
  - maxims inscribed by 17, 144, 509, 519, 531–535, 537, 545–546
  - methodology and interpretation 535–536
  - motivation of 533–535
  - pleasures 176
  - psychic pain of 207
  - sense perceptions 197

- stones, texts, and editions 545–546
- on the virtues 169–171
- wealth and 167
- Diogenes of Seleucia 303
- Diogenianus 326–327
- Dionysius of Alexandria 597–598
- Dionysius of Lamptre 22
- Dionysius Thrax 336
- Discours anatomiques* (Lamy) 651
- disloyalty in friendship 292
- dissident Epicureans 32–36
- d'Ivernois, Francis 713
- Divinae Institutiones* (Lactantius) 598, 619
- divine intervention, rejection of 55, 99–100
- divine providence, *see* providence
- divinity of celestial bodies 89–90, 107–108
- Dobbs, B. J. T. 654
- Donini, Pierluigi 487
- Dorandi, Tiziano 383, 386, 406, 416
- “down” in the universe 74–75, 84
- dreams 197–198, 538–539
- Duchesneau, François 645
- early modern Epicureanism 671–710
  - and ancient Epicureanism, compared 671–677
  - cardiocentrism 684–686
  - ethics, happiness and self-preservation 686–692
  - the heart in 684–686
  - justice, utility and contract 692–695
  - mechanistic psychology of 677–684
  - political theory of Gassendi 695–698
  - self-preservation 684–686
  - society and human nature 699–704
  - utility vs. sovereignty 704–706
- earthquakes 89
- Ecclesiastes 594
- eclipses 91
- Eclogues* (Vergil) 459, 460–462, 467
- Edelstein, Dan 715
- egoism and friendship 253, 254, 256, 258
- egoistic hedonism 747, 748, 755–757, *see also* hedonism
- Egyptians 543–544
- eidola* 107, 111, 681, 787, 803
  - sense perception and 103–104, 195–198, 200
- eighteenth century Epicureanism 656–664, 711–728, *see also* materialism



Elazar ben Arakh (Rabbi) [552](#), [555–559](#), [567](#)  
*Elements of Law Natural and Politic* (Hobbes) [679](#), [687–688](#)  
eliminativism [224](#)  
Elisha ben Abuya [579](#)  
Empedoclean metaphor [317–318](#)  
Empedocles [432](#), [437](#), [438](#), [444](#)  
empiricism [57–58](#)  
empty space, *see* [void](#)  
*enargeia* [21](#), [100](#), [103](#), [105](#), [764](#)  
Ennius [441–442](#)  
entropy [61](#)  
Ephrem [592](#)  
*epibolê* [203](#)  
Epictetus [29](#), [729](#), [732](#)  
Epicure, definitions of [714](#)  
Epicureanism  
    blessings of [289–292](#)  
    community practices of [256–257](#)  
    extensionalist language of [309](#)  
    ideological uniformity of [34–35](#)  
    negative associations with [590–591](#)  
    propositions of [756](#)  
    study of, benefits from [278](#)  
    women, as students of [37](#), [544–545](#), [675](#)  
Epicureans  
    genuine vs. dissident [32–36](#)  
    golden age of [541](#)  
    in politics [301–304](#), [333](#)  
    in priestly offices [110–111](#)  
    rhetoric of [341–344](#)  
Epicurus [14–18](#), [451](#)  
    as an empiricist [57–58](#)  
    deathbed of [122](#), [155](#), [178](#), [181](#), [202](#), [489](#)  
    egoism of [252–253](#)  
    epistemology of [43](#), [52](#)  
    importance of [2](#)  
    in Judaism [551–553](#)  
    leaders, contempt for [561–562](#)  
    as object of veneration [113](#)  
    on pain [133–134](#)  
    personality of [296](#), [297](#)  
    reductionist view of atomism [224–225](#)  
    as tree trunk [284](#), [292](#), [304](#)  
    will of [37–38](#), [541–542](#)  
    *see also* specific writings of

epideictic rhetoric 337, 339, 341, 344  
epigrams of Philodemus 439–440  
*epilogismos* 57–58, 517  
epistemology 43–58  
    criteria of 44–52  
    criticism of by Plutarch 515  
    and ethics 56–58  
    scientific method 52–56  
*Epistle to Herodotus* (Epicurus) 99, 101, 107, *see also Letter to Herodotus* (Epicurus)  
    and language 310, 320  
*Epistle to Menoeceus* (Epicurus), *see Letter to Menoeceus* (Epicurus)  
*Epistle to Pythocles* (Epicurus), *see Letter to Pythocles* (Epicurus)  
*Epistles* (Horace) 469–471  
*Epistulae Morales* (Seneca) 259, 489–490, 497, 499  
Erler, Michael 383  
erotic desire 510, 544  
Esposito, Dominico 391–392  
Eternal Epicurus of Nietzsche 782–783  
*Ethica Comparetti* (Philodemus) 418–419  
ethical hedonism 146–149, 151, 152–153, *see also hedonism*  
ethics 7, 16–17, 676–677, 686–692  
    criticism of by Cicero 478–480  
    criticism of by Plutarch 515  
    and epistemology 56–58  
    and fear of death 136  
    of Horace and Vergil 457, 460  
    and humanists of the Renaissance 628  
    Marx on 778–779  
    and modern Epicureanism 673–674  
    and moral sense 730  
    physics and 81  
    Seneca on 492–493  
    Serres on 803–804  
    and theology 111, 112, 276  
*eudaimonia* 118, 119, 134–135, 254  
    Horace and Vergil and 457, 459, 460  
eudemonism 180  
Eudoxus 141, 148  
*eusebeia* 459  
Eusebius 596, 597–598  
euthanasia 128, 129  
Evans, Matthew 258–261, 273  
Evelyn, John 626  
extensionalism 308–311

fear 202, 209  
    and cosmology 81–82, 85, 92  
    of death 118, 120, 122–124, 130–138, 211–212, 465–466  
    desires related to 165  
    and meteorology 87–89, 92  
    psychic distress of 207–208  
    of torture in the afterlife 131  
feelings 204–205, 212  
    and beliefs 204, 208–210  
    Stoics' classifications of 207  
    *see also* pain, feelings of;  
    pleasure, feelings of  
Ficino, Marsilio 631, 633  
fine body of the soul 190–191  
first imprints 215–217  
flat disc shape of earth 74, 83  
flattery 413–414  
focusing of the mind 231–232, 236  
Fonzio, Bartolomeo 622  
forensic rhetoric 337  
Formey, J. H. S. 657  
Foucault, Michel 793  
Fowler, Don 244, 791–792  
Frachetta, Girolamo 632  
Franceschi, Raffaele 632–633, 635  
frank criticism 341, 459  
Franklin, Benjamin 739  
Frede, Dorothea 271, 272, 279  
free will 6, 240–241, 578  
freedom of pleasures 711–728  
French Enlightenment 712–714  
    Epicureanism in 716  
friendship 250–283, 291–292  
    in antiquity 257–258  
    Cicero on 261, 263–272, 281, 479–480  
    criticism of Epicureanism 180, 279–280  
    Derrida on 800  
    disloyalty in 292  
    egoist motives for 253, 254, 256, 258  
    goals of 281  
    and hedonism 171, 251, 264, 268–270  
    intrinsic good of 147, 169, 251  
    as pact for mutual love 267–268  
    Philodemus 275–279  
    pleasures of 252, 266, 268–273, 757

for safety and protection 253, 266, 292  
as self-regarding 250–251, 254–275  
Seneca on 259–260, 495  
of Stoics 259, 260, 280, 479–480, 495  
writings on 254–255

Gaines, Robert 343–344

Gaius Memmius 385, 401, 446

Gale, Monica R. 367

Gallavotti, Carlo 397

Garden of Epicurus in Athens

decline of 24–25

founding of 15

friendship within 256, 261

organization and common life of 37–38

succession in 293

Gassendi, Pierre 632, 642–645, 650, 655, 658, 677–684

animal spirits of 653, 681

atomism of 6, 649, 681, 682

Descartes, criticism of 680

ethics, happiness and self-preservation in 676–677, 686, 688–692

the heart in 684–686

and Hobbes, friendship with 678

justice, utility and contract 4, 692–695

and modern Epicureanism 672–676

naturalism and conventionalism 696–697

nature, law of 697–698

political theory of, innovations in 695–698

politics for 676

psychology in 680–683, 685

society and human nature 699–704

utilitarianism 696

utility vs. sovereignty 704–706

writings by 678–679, 684, 685

see also specific writings of

*Gastronomie, La* (Berchoux) 719–722

gastronomy 715–716, 719–721

Gaultier, Abraham 655–656

*Gay Science, The* (Nietzsche) 783, 784

*Georgics* (Vergil) 462

*Georgos* (Menander) 370–372

Germany, Epicurus in 761–790

Hegel 763–768

Marx 768–780

Nietzsche 780–788

Ghislieri, Michele 631  
Giancotti, Francesco 410  
Gigandet, Alain 263, 264  
Gigante, Marcello 390, 398–399  
    on Philodemus 380–381, 385–389, 410, 414, 419  
    writings of 383  
Glidden, David 308, 311  
Glisson, Francis 650, 653  
gods 7, 97–98, 595, 768, 799–800  
    benefits from 112–113  
    as causes of phenomena 55  
    Cicero on 97, 99, 111, 481, 484, 586, 598–599  
    Derrida on 799–800  
    existence of 90, 95–97, 102–103, 586–589  
    friendship between 276, 277–279  
    Hegel on 768  
    human shape of 105–106  
    inactivity of 98, 101  
    to know 106–107  
    language for analysis of 311–312  
    Marx on 772, 780  
    nature of 98–101, 104–105, 131, 539  
    need for humans for 590  
    Nietzsche on 787  
    perception of 107, 200  
    Plutarch on 515–516, 588  
    powers of 109–110  
    Seneca on 492, 495  
    simulacra from 586  
    voice and language of 318  
Goldin, Judah 555  
Goldschmidt, Victor 262, 694  
*Gorgias* (Plato) 141, 285  
    on rhetoric 334  
*Gospel of Thomas* 582  
*gourmand* 715–716  
gravity, atomic theory and 72–74  
“greatest happiness principle” 744, 748–749  
Greek language, superiority of 318  
Greenblatt, Stephen 714  
Gregory Nazianzen 603  
Gregory of Nyssa 601–602  
Gregory Thaumaturgus 596  
grief  
    over others’ deaths 121–122

Seneca on [504–505](#)  
Griffin, Mariam [499](#)  
Grotius, Hugo [671](#), [672](#), [695](#)  
Guerra, Tepedino [316](#)  
*Guide of the Perplexed* (Maimonides) [566](#), [568–570](#)  
    atomic physics in [571–573](#)  
    creation theories [573](#), [576](#)  
    deity in [575–576](#)  
    prophecy in [573](#)  
    on providence [573–574](#)  
    on the universe, nature of [574–575](#)  
“guides” of the Garden [19](#)  
Guidobaldi, Maria Paola [391–392](#), [401](#)  
Gutenberg [624](#), [636](#)

Hadrian [30](#), [532](#)  
Halevi, Yehudah [566](#), [567](#)  
Hall, Alan [531](#)  
Hammerstaedt, Jürgen [327](#), [544–546](#)  
Hankins, James [617](#)  
Hannah, Jack [582](#)  
happiness [162](#), [163](#)  
    criticism of by Plutarch [515–516](#)  
    criticism of Epicureanism [180–181](#)  
    and the gods [111](#), [113](#)  
    and incorrect ideas about death [118–119](#)  
    successful achievement of [57](#)  
    in Victorian England [747–748](#)  
    see also [pleasure](#), feelings of  
Harvey, William [649](#), [684](#), [685](#)  
health, pleasure of [153–154](#), [160](#), [161](#), [164](#)  
    criticism of Epicurean hedonism [173](#), [174](#)  
heart in early modern Epicureanism [684–686](#)  
heavenly airs [91–92](#)  
Heberdey, Rudolf [546](#)  
*hēdonē* [348](#), [349](#), [478](#)  
    Serres on [803](#)  
hedonism [7](#), [141–188](#)  
    calculus of [149–153](#), [297](#), [300](#)  
    criticism of [143–145](#), [172–183](#)  
    desires, classification of [164–168](#)  
    egoistic [747](#), [748](#), [755–757](#)  
    elaboration and defense of [153–163](#)  
    and friendship [171](#), [251](#), [264](#), [268–270](#)  
    humanist opinions on [618](#)

- and modern Epicureanism 673
- pleasure as the moral end 145–149, 169
- in utilitarianism 745–753
- virtues, status of 168–171
- Hegel, G. W. F. 1, 762, 763–768, 770, 773, 776
  - on atomism 763–768
  - on gods 768
- Helmbold, William Clark 508
- helping element 234–235
- Helvétius, Claude 744
- Hemmerdinger, B. 393–394
- Heraclitus 437
- Herculaneum and papyri of 2, 14, 379–429
  - library of 17–18, 21–22, 26–28, 387, 403–421
  - Vergil and 457–458
  - Villa of the Papyri 391–403
- Hermarchus 20, 437, 438, 600
  - on killing 128, 701–702
  - language investigations of 317–318, 321, 327
  - Seneca and 504
  - successor of Epicurus 293, 401, 436
  - utility vs. sovereignty 704–706
- Hesiod 15, 347, 432
- Hierocles 480
- Hilary of Poitiers 598, 599
- History of Philosophy* (Brucker) 656
- History of the Academic Philosophers* (Philodemus) 379, 380
- Hobbes, Thomas 645, 646, 677–684
  - cognitive powers in 681–683
  - Descartes, criticism of 680
  - ethics, happiness and self-preservation in 676, 677, 686–690
  - and Gassendi, friendship with 678
  - the heart in 685–686
  - justice, utility and contract 4, 692
  - and modern Epicureanism 674, 675–676
  - motive powers in 684
  - society and human nature 699–704
  - utility vs. sovereignty 704–706
  - writings by 679, 687–688, 690
  - see also specific writings of
- Hoffman, George 542
- Homer 473
- “honeyed cup” simile 367, 368
- Horace 3, 456–475
  - on *amor* 462–463



- and death, fear of 465–466
- education of 456–457
- plain living in 467
- pleasure in 465–466
- on the Stoics 467–470
- see also specific writings of
- horses, motion of 241, 242
- Houston, G. W. 405, 406
- Hubbard, Margaret 466
- human rights, emergence of 673–675
- humanist dissemination of Epicureanism 615–640
  - censorship and persecution 631–636
  - Epicureanism without Epicureans 618–620
  - Lucretian language 626–631
  - printing of texts 624–626, 635, 636
  - recovery and dissemination 620–626
  - the Renaissance context 616–618
  - scholarly reading practices 626–631
- Hume, David 743
- Hutcheson, Francis 743
- Hutchinson, G. O. 446
- Hutchinson, Lucy 632
- hylozoist 646
- hypolepsis* 104–105
- hypothesis and phenomena, consistency with 54–55
  
- ibn Daud, Abraham 566, 567
- ibn Ezra, Abraham 566, 567
- ibn Tibbon, Samuel 572
- Idomeneus 290, 499
- Iliad* (Homer) 473
- immortality of the soul 599, 601–602, 652–653
- Immortality of the Soul, The* (More) 646
- impiety 104
- In Pisonem* (Cicero) 385, 476, 482
- “inconceivably” large 67–69
- incorruptibility of the divine 97–98, 101
- increasing constitution 227–228
- Indelli, Giovanni 419, 473
- inference from the phenomena 238
- inferences
  - as demonstrations 56
  - sign 52, 54, 56
- infinity 70–71, 82–83
  - classes of 68

of worlds 541  
Intensionalism 308–309  
*Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, An* (Bentham) 744  
intuition about death 127  
intuitionism 751, 752  
investigation into the facts 359  
*Invitation to Piso* (Philodemus) 363, 389–390  
Inwood, Brad 499  
Ioppolo, Anna M. 416  
Irenaeus 591, 595  
Isidore of Seville 604–605  
*isonomia* 95–96  
Italy 25–26  
    Philodemus of Gadara in 26, 30, 382–390, 404  
    the Renaissance in 616–617  
  
Janko, Richard 348, 411, 458  
Jefferson, Thomas 3, 729–741  
    and Epicurus 730–732, 737, 740  
    reason and 732–733, 735  
    religion of 733–740  
Jerome 603–604  
Jerusalem Talmud 558, 560, 564, 569, 570  
*Jesus and Socrates Compared* (Priestley) 733  
Jesus Christ 256, 582, 584  
    Thomas Jefferson on 729, 733–736, 739  
Journey to Brundisium (Horace) 458  
Jovinian 603  
Judaism 543–544, 585, *see also* Rabbinic literature and Epicureanism  
Julius Caesar 137  
justice 4–5, 128, 137, 169, 526  
    and friendship 260–262, 265–266  
    and modern Epicureanism 673, 674  
    preconceptions of 315–316  
    Seneca on 494–495  
    usefulness of 295  
Justin Martyr 590  
  
Kalām beliefs 571–573  
Kalinka, Ernst 546  
Kant, Immanuel 761  
katastematic pleasure 155–162  
    bodily pleasure 206  
    criticism of Epicurean hedonism 172–179  
    nature of 204–205

- and poetry 442
- psychic pleasures 207
- and virtue 168–169
- kathēgemonēs* 19–21, 29, 32–35, 37
- Katsnelson, Berel 550, 551
- kenodoxia* 113, 435
- Key Doctrines* (Epicurus) 14, 17, 45, 466, 472, 499
  - Diogenes of Oenoanda and 537
  - on fear 81
  - the gods 98, 99, 589
  - politics 298–299
  - Seneca and 489, 494, 496, 502, 503
- killing, wrongness of 127–128, 137
  - in Hermarchus 701–702
- kinetic pleasure 155–162
  - bodily pleasure 206
  - criticism of Epicurean hedonism 172–175, 177, 178
  - nature of 205
  - and poetry 442
  - psychic pleasures 207
- Konstan, David 258, 262–263
- Korach 563–568
- Kors, Alan 644
- kritikoi* 361
  
- La Mettrie, Julien Offray de 658–663, *see also* specific writings of
- la politesse gourmande* 724–725
- La Reynière, Grimod de 722–727
- Labendz, Jenny 555–558, 561
- Laclos, Pierre Choderlos de 716
- Lactantius 589, 590, 598–599, 604, 618–619
  - on Epicurus 699
- Lamprias catalogue 508
- Lampsacus, school founded by Epicurus in 15
- Lamy, Guillaume 651–652, 655, 658–659
- Lange, Friedrich Albert 96
- language 308–332
  - Colotes, contributions of 317
  - Demetrius Laco, contributions of 323–327
  - Diogenes of Oenoanda, contributions of 326–327
  - and errors of communication 309, 315
  - Hermarchus, contributions of 317–318, 321, 327
  - linguistic methodology of Epicurus 310–316
  - Lucretius' perspective 319–323
  - meaning, analysis of 323–326

- Metrodorus, contributions of 316–317, 321
- nameless things 319–320
- origin of 308–309, 320–322, 326–327
- orthodoxy and innovations in 316–318, 328
- Philodemus of Gadara, contributions of 323–327
- poetry 322–323
- Polystratus, contributions of 317
- and reality, relationship with 308
- Latour, Bruno 800
- Laws of Repentance* (Maimonides) 567–569
- Layton, Henry 652–653
- Le Clerc, Jean 646, 648, 660
- L'École des Gourmands* (Chazet) 716–719
- Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (Hegel) 762, 763
- legacy, deceased person's 126, 129
- Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Blumenberg) 793–796
- Lehem Mishneh* 568
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 649, 664
  - and Epicureanism, criticisms of 672
- Leto, Pomponio 623, 627, 629, 633
- Letter sur les aveugles* (Diderot) 660
- Letter to Antipater* (Diogenes) 541
- Letter to Herodotus* (Epicurus) 16, 190, 201, 765
  - atomism 73, 225
  - cosmology 84–86, 777
  - criteria of truth 47, 48, 52
  - language 313
  - death in 120
  - ethics in 16–17
  - on friendship 251, 279
  - hedonism in 144, 156, 168, 470
  - moral responsibility in 225–226
  - plain living in 467
  - Seneca and 489, 499–500, 502
  - soul and body in 190
  - on study of Epicureanism 278
  - theology in 97, 102, 110–111
    - Letter to Menoeceus* (Epicurus) 461, 466, 545, 594, 595
- Letter to Mother* (Epicurus) 162, 542
- Letter to Pythocles* (Epicurus) 16, 490, 541, 542
  - cosmology and meteorology 85–88
  - divine nature in 100, 101
- Letter to Pythocles* (Lucretius) 30
- Letter to the Pisos* (Horace) 456
- Letters to Serena* (Toland) 653, 654, 662

*Leviathan* (Hobbes) 688, 705, 706  
*L'Histoire naturelle de l'âme* (La Mettrie) 658–659  
*L'Homme machine* (La Mettrie) 658  
*L'Homme-plante* (La Mettrie) 662  
*libera voluntas* 240–241, 243, 451  
liberal arts 349–350, 352, 354  
Lieberman, S. 555  
life after death 119, 124  
    Christianity on 740  
    fear of torture in 131  
*Life of Epicurus* (Diogenes Laertius) 13–14, 32  
*Life of Philonides* 14  
lightning 88  
*Likutei Mohoran* (Nachman) 577, 578  
limit  
    atomism and 63, 69  
    death as 462  
    infinity and 70–71, 82–83  
    of pleasure 143, 160–161, 167, 433, 478–479  
Lippold, Georg 394  
literary critics, Epicureans as 370–372  
*Live in Obscurity* (Plutarch) 524, 525  
*Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (Diogenes Laertius) 407  
*Lives* (Plutarch) 508, 515, 524  
Livy 447  
Locke, John 255, 706  
*logos* 735, 736  
Lolordo, Antonio 644  
Long, A. A. 308  
Longo Auricchio, Francesca 388, 398  
Lorenz, Thuri 402  
Lucian 31, 531, 540, 591, 615  
Lucilius 484, 490, 503–504  
    Seneca and 497–500  
Lucretius 30, 430–455, 482  
    on action 212  
    and atomic theory 69  
    cosmology and 82–86, 90–91  
    development, human 230  
    on dreams 197–198  
    early Christianity and 598  
    fear of death 131–132, 202  
    hedonism 144, 156, 165  
    humanists and 626–636  
    on language 319–323

- meteorology and [87](#), [88–89](#)
- on the mind [193](#), [196–197](#), [201](#), [208–210](#)
- on pleasure and pain [206–207](#)
- and poetics [366–370](#)
- on poetry [322–323](#)
- and rhetoric [335](#)
- and scientific method [55](#)
- on sense perceptions [46](#), [50](#), [51](#), [199](#)
- Serres on [800](#), [801](#), [804](#)
- on the soul and body [191](#), [192](#), [210](#)
- on theology [102](#), [111](#), [113](#)
- see also* specific writings of
- Lucullus [484](#), [508](#), [524](#)
- Lucullus* (Cicero) [476](#)
- Lurianic kabbala [577](#), [580](#)
- Luther, Martin [95](#)
- luxuries and pleasure [176](#), [177](#)
- Lysias of Samos [303](#)
- Lysis* (Plato) [317](#), [355–356](#)

- Machiavelli [622](#), [627](#), [629–630](#), [633](#)
- Mackey, Jacob [323–324](#)
- Macrobius [519](#)
- Maecenas [456](#)
- Maimonides [566–576](#)
  - on the *Apiqoros* [556](#)
  - on Aristotle [572](#), [574–576](#)
  - atomism of [571–573](#)
  - see also* specific writings of
- Malpighino, Giovanni [620](#)
- Mandeville, Bernard [656](#)
- Mangoni, Cecilia [348](#)
- Manilius, Marcus [108](#)
- Manuel des Amphitryons* (La Reynière) [722](#), [723–725](#)
- many worlds of Epicurus [83](#), [86](#)
- Marchetti, Alessandro [626](#), [635](#)
- Marcus, Hannah [635](#)
- Marcus Aurelius [531](#), [730](#)
- Mark, Zvi [579](#)
- Marschies, Christoph [596](#), [598](#)
- Marullo, Michele Tarcaniota [622](#)
- Marx, Karl [727](#), [762](#), [768–780](#), [786](#)
  - on atomism [771–773](#), [775–779](#)
  - on ethics [778–779](#)
  - on Hegel [763](#), [768](#)

- on swerve, atomic [771–772](#)
- Masi, Francesca [226](#), [236](#)
- materialism [641–670](#)
  - atoms, properties of [643–650](#)
  - the eighteenth century [656–664](#)
  - Epicureanism and [642](#)
  - and modern Epicureanism [683](#), [684–685](#)
  - on souls [650–656](#)
  - see also [atomism](#)
- mathematical entities [592](#)
- matter vs. void [60–61](#)
- Mattusch, Carol [399–400](#), [402](#)
- Maupertuis, Pierre-Louis Moreau de [659](#), [661](#)
- mechanistic psychology of modern Epicureanism [677–684](#)
- meditative reading [500](#)
- Memmius, C. [401](#)
- Memoirs* (Philodemus) [14](#)
- Memorabilia of Socrates* (Xenophon) [733](#), [736–737](#)
- memories
  - pleasure of [153](#), [158](#)
  - and preconceptions [200](#)
- “men” of the Garden [19](#)
- Menander [370–372](#)
- Meno* (Plato) [47](#)
- Menoceus [57](#)
- Mersenne, Marin [678](#), [679](#)
- meteorology [6](#), [87–89](#), [92](#)
- Methods of Ethics, The* (Sidgwick) [745](#)
- Metrodorus [19–20](#), [289](#), [292](#), [302](#), [562](#)
  - language investigations of [316–317](#), [321](#)
  - on pleasure [156](#), [167](#)
  - and poetics [353–355](#), [357](#), [361](#), [373](#)
  - Seneca and [489](#), [490](#), [498](#), [504](#)
  - on the wise [415](#)
- Mill, John Stuart [730](#), [743](#), [744–745](#)
  - egoistic hedonism [756–757](#)
  - on pain, absence of [753](#)
  - on pleasure [748–751](#), [759](#)
- Miller, Mary Ashburn [715](#)
- mind
  - of animals [193–194](#), [208–209](#)
  - and belief [199–200](#)
  - criticism of Epicurean hedonism [177–178](#)
  - development of [230](#)
  - and feelings [204](#), [210](#)



focus of 231  
and hedonism 154, 155, 159, 160, 171  
nature of 189, 196–197  
philosophical preparation of 201–202  
rational and non-rational functions of 208–209  
and soul and body 192–194  
and the swerve, atomic 244  
minimal parts of atoms 63–67, 69–70  
*Mishnah*, Apikoros in 553–559  
*Mishneh Torah* (Maimonides) 567–570  
Mitsis, Phillip 245, 687  
modern Epicureanism 671–677  
    and materialism 683, 684–685  
    and pleasure 697, 698  
molecule of Diderot 661  
Molière 716, 717, 723  
Mommsen, Theodor 393, 395, 397  
monads of Leibniz 649  
Montaigne 630  
moon, light of 91–92  
moral responsibility, *see* voluntary action and responsibility  
moral sense of Thomas Jefferson 730  
*Moralia* (Plutarch) 515  
morality 145–149, 155, 171  
    and the swerve, atomic 245  
More, Henry 646, 647  
mortalists 652  
mortality 135–136  
motion  
    of animals 212, 241–242  
    of atoms 61–62, 71–73, 238  
    by living beings 241–244  
    in the universe 84–87, 90–92  
Müller, Reimar 693, 697  
multiple-correspondence simile 443  
multiple explanations 7, 539  
    in cosmology 85–87  
    in meteorology 87–88  
    of swerve, atomic 246  
    in theology 100  
murder, wrongness of 127–128  
Muscettola, Adamo 395  
“My Chances/*Mes Chances*: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies” (Derrida) 797, 799  
Myth of Er 519

Naas, Michael 796–797  
 Nachman of Breslov (Rabbi) 577–580  
 names, origin of 313  
 Naples, Epicureans in 390  
 natural desires 164–165, 211–212  
 “natural history of man”, see [materialism](#)  
*Natural History of Revolution* (Miller) 715  
 natural law in Epicureanism 673–674, 693–694, 697–698  
*Naturales Quaestiones* (Seneca) 100, 490, 491  
 naturalism and conventionalism 696–697  
 naturalism and hedonism 153  
 Nausiphanes of Teos 15, 19, 27, 342, 561  
 necessary desires 164–166, 211  
 necessity, non-Epicurean concept of 230, 232–235  
 Needham, John Turberville 662  
 Newton, Isaac 654, 664, 740  
 Nicasicrates 23, 36  
 Niccoli, Niccolò 621, 622, 627  
 Nicholas V (Pope) 616  
*Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle) 685  
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 762, 780–788  
     on Christianity and Epicureanism 787  
 Nilus 602–603  
 Nisbet, Robert G. M. 394, 466  
 non-attestation in sense perception 53  
 non-contestation in sense perception 53–54  
 non-necessary desires 164–166  
*Non posse* (Plutarch) 508–509, 518, 522–523  
 normative hedonism 148, 745–753, see also [hedonism](#)  
 “not strictly infinite” 67–70  
 Numenius 34, 509  
 Numicius 471

Obbink, Dirk 418  
 O’Connor, David 256, 257  
 Octavius, Marcus 393–394, 406  
*Odes* (Horace) 465  
 Oenomaus of Gadara 540  
 O’Keefe, Timothy 224, 254, 272–275  
 old age 543, 545  
 oligarchic man 165  
 omega, in mathematics 68  
*On Anger* (Philodemus) 29, 409  
*On Arrogance* (Philodemus) 413  
*On Characters and Ways of Life* (Philodemus) 27, 381–382, 409, 412

*On Choices and Avoidance* (Philodemus) 28, 151, 152–153, 155–156, 158, 419  
*On Conversation* (Philodemus) 27, 417  
*On Death* (Philodemus) 28, 414, 418, 419  
*On Economy* (Philodemus) 413  
*On Envy* (Basil) 602  
*On Epicurus* (Philodemus) 14, 408, 420  
*On Flattery* (Philodemus) 29, 413  
*On Frank Criticism* (Philodemus) 14, 27, 28, 343, 459  
*On Frankness* (Philodemus) 409  
*On Gratitude* (Philodemus) 27, 417  
*On Greed* (Philodemus) 413  
*On Kingship* (Epicurus) 372  
*On Methods of Inference* (Philodemus) 28  
*On Music* (Philodemus) 361, 410  
*On Nature* (Dionysius) 597–598  
*On Nature* (Empedocles) 438  
*On Nature* (Epicurus) 14, 30, 214, 245, 435, 588  
     on atheists 96  
     existing books of 17–18  
     moral responsibility in 226–234  
*On Philosophy* (Polyaenus) 112  
*On Piety* (Philodemus) 14, 28, 420, 595  
*On Poems* (Metrodorus) 353, 357, 361, 373  
*On Poems* (Philodemus) 325, 348, 358, 410, 411  
     poetry, qualities of 27, 361  
*On Property Management* (Philodemus) 167  
*On Providence* (Philodemus) 28  
*On Relieving Arrogance* (Aristo of Ceos) 415  
*On Rhetoric* (Philodemus) 29, 337–341, 343, 361, 380, 398, 410  
     art, rhetoric as 26–27, 36, 353–354  
     dedication to 385, 386  
     on poetry 362  
*On Sanctity* (Epicurus) 589  
*On Signs and Inferences* (Philodemus) 418, 419  
*On Slander* (Philodemus) 413  
*On the End* (Epicurus) 156  
*On the Gods* (Philodemus) 28, 418  
*On the Good King According to Homer* (Philodemus) 26, 28, 353, 372, 373, 398–399, 411, 414  
*On the Lifestyle of the Gods* (Philodemus) 418  
*On the Moral End* (Epicurus) 146, 158–159, 179  
*On the Nature of Things* (Lucretius) 144  
*On the Opinions of the Philosophers* (Plutarch) 73  
*On the Stoics* (Philodemus) 27, 409  
*On the Use of Poems* (Zeno of Sidon) 357–358, 361  
*On the Vices Similar to Flattery* (Philodemus) 413

*On Vices and Their Opposing Virtues* (Philodemus) 27, 387, 402, 412, 414, 458  
*On Wealth* (Philodemus) 14, 27, 370  
“one thought too many” 272–273  
O’Neil, Edward N. 508  
*Opera omnia* (Gassendi) 678  
Opramoas of Rhodiapolis 534–535  
oracular prophecy 540  
*Orator* (Cicero) 479  
*Ordering of the Philosophers* (Philodemus) 398, 407–408, 420  
Origen 585, 590–591, 595–598, 600–601  
    Platonism of 597  
original constitution 227  
Orpheus, myth of 462, 463  
Osler, Margaret 642, 644, 647  
*otium* 447, 466  
*ouk antimartyrēsis* 105  
Ovid 627

Paganini, Gianni 648  
Pagano, Mario 401  
*paideia* 334–335, 347, 440, 445, 518, 523, 534  
pain, feelings of 211  
    choices, for and against 149–150, 297  
    criteria for truth, Epicurus’s 48  
    criticism of Epicurean hedonism 179, 181–182  
    evil of 146–147  
    fear of 133–134  
    and hedonism 142  
    and life’s goal 57  
    management of 168  
    mind’s contributions to 154, 155, 179  
    mind’s protection against 179, 202  
    Seneca on 502–503  
painlessness 478–479, 753–755  
    Cicero on 478  
    criticism of Epicurean hedonism 175, 176  
    as pleasure 155, 156, 160, 161–162, 167, 171, 173, 205  
Paleario, Aonio 633  
Pandermalis, Dimitrios 394–397  
panegyric 339, 340, 344  
Pansa Caetronianus, Gaius Vibius 386  
Parmenides 520  
past, view of 298–300  
*pathē* 152, 156, 190, 204, 207  
Patristic philosophy 582, 583, 598

Patro [25](#), [401](#), [476](#)  
 Paul, the apostle [582–586](#), [589](#), [591](#), [594](#), [604](#)  
 penalties, fear of [501](#)  
*Pensées philosophiques* (Diderot) [660](#)  
*Peri Parresias* (Philodemus) [262](#)  
*Peri physeōs* (Epicurus) [31](#), [96](#), see also *On Nature* (Epicurus)  
 personal security [291](#), [299](#)  
 Petrarch [616](#), [618–620](#)  
*Phaedo* (Plato) [601](#)  
 Phaedrus [25](#), [382](#), [476](#)  
*Phaedrus* (Plato) [334](#), [796–797](#)  
*Phenomena* (Aratus of Soli) [108](#)  
*Phenomenology of Spirit, The* (Hegel) [763](#), [773](#)  
*Philebus* (Plato) [478](#), [507](#)  
*philia* [263](#)  
 Philip of Thessalonika [363](#)  
 Philippson, Robert [349](#), [386](#), [693](#)  
 Philippus, Lucius Marcius [398](#)  
 Philo of Alexandria [585](#), [594](#)  
 Philo of Larissa [476](#)  
*Philocalia* (Origen) [595](#)  
 Philodemus of Gadara [26–30](#), [379–429](#), [445](#), [458](#)  
     analysis of nature [517](#)  
     in Athens [381–382](#)  
     Cicero on [384–387](#), [476](#), [482–483](#)  
     death of [390](#), [394](#)  
     desires, classification of [164–165](#), [211–212](#)  
     and dissident Epicureans [35–36](#)  
     early life and education of [379–381](#)  
     early treatises [407–410](#)  
     friendship [275–279](#)  
     and the gods [276](#), [277–279](#), [595](#)  
     on hedonism [151](#), [152–153](#), [156–157](#), [162](#), [169](#)  
     influence of [28–29](#)  
     in Italy [26](#), [30](#), [382–390](#), [404](#)  
     language investigations of [323–327](#)  
     literary criticism of [372](#)  
     mature thoughts of [407](#), [411–420](#)  
     on mind [194](#), [202](#)  
     modern discoveries from [2](#), [3](#)  
     on pain [211](#)  
     physical pleasures and [153–154](#)  
     Piso, relationship with [384–388](#), [398](#), [400](#), [402](#)  
     poems of [362–366](#), [389–390](#)  
     and poetics [349](#), [361–368](#), [373](#), [439–440](#)

- on politics [288](#), [301–302](#), [304](#)
- theology [96](#), [105](#), [106](#)
- on wealth [167](#)
- writings of [144](#)
- and Zeno of Sidon [28](#), [29](#), [381–383](#)
- see also* specific writings of
- philoi* [263](#)
- Philonides of Laodicea [22](#), [304](#), [372](#), [419–420](#)
- Philosophiae Epicuri syntagma* (Gassendi) [684](#)
- Philosophical Dissertation on Death, A* (Radicati) [654](#)
- philosophy
  - insights and rules of [297](#)
  - life practices of [516–517](#)
  - Plutarch’s opinion of [509](#)
  - study of [118](#)
  - as therapy of a sick soul [287–288](#)
- physical pleasures [153–154](#), [160](#), [177–178](#)
- Physics* (Aristotle) [574](#)
- Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charletoniana* (Charleton) [649](#)
- Piaggio’s machine [416](#)
- Pintard, René [644](#)
- Piso Caesoninus, Lucius Calpurnius [384–389](#), [458](#)
  - Cicero on [476](#), [482](#)
  - and the Villa of the papyri [391](#), [395](#), [398](#), [400](#), [402](#), [405](#)
- Pius, Albertus [634](#)
- Pius II (Pope) [95](#)
- place of the gods [89–90](#)
- placidity [209](#)
- Plato
  - Cicero’s opinion of [479](#), [481](#), [485](#)
  - on desires [165](#)
  - friendships of [280](#)
  - on hedonism [141](#), [156](#)
  - Origen and [597](#)
  - Patristic philosophy and [583](#)
  - philosopher kings of [523–524](#)
  - Plutarch and [507](#)
  - on politics [285](#), [526](#)
  - Renaissance interest in [618](#)
  - on rhetoric [334](#)
  - soul, immortality of [514–515](#)
  - Thomas Jefferson on [733–734](#)
  - see also* specific writings of
- Platonic Theology* (Ficino) [631](#)
- “Plato’s Pharmacy” (Derrida) [796–797](#)

pleasure, feelings of 205–207, 465–466  
availability of 167  
body's contributions to 142, 153–155, 160, 177–178  
choices, for and against 149–150, 202, 351, 746  
Cicero on 478–479  
criteria for truth, Epicurus's 48  
criticism of Epicurean hedonism 173–176, 181, 182  
and discomfort, lack of 176  
from food, for the French 716–725, 727  
in French thought 712–714  
in friendships 252, 266, 268–273, 757  
health 153–154, 160, 161  
and length of life 160–161  
and life's goal 57, 169, 208  
and memories 153, 158  
mind's contributions to 154, 155, 177–178  
and modern Epicureanism 697, 698  
as the moral end 145–149, 169  
Plutarch on 515, 522–523  
and politics 286–287  
in rhetoric 340  
Seneca on 493–494  
utilitarianism 746–755, 759  
and virtue 141–142, 168–171, 179–180, 757  
*see also* [hedonism](#); [painlessness](#)

Plotina, Pompeia 30

Plotinus 600

Plutarch 507–530, 561  
anti-politics of Epicurus 523–526  
as author, intentions of 512–514  
background of 509–510  
case studies of 518–526  
continuity in 510–511  
criticism of Epicureanism 178, 284–285, 514–516, 519–520  
Epicurean doctrine in 510, 511–512  
and Epicurus, opinions of 509–510  
*epilogismos* of 517  
on the gods 515–516, 588  
on language 311, 312  
method of 516–518  
persona in writings of 510  
philosophy, opinion of 509  
and Plato 507  
on pleasure 515, 522–523  
and poetry 351, 354



- on rhetoric 335
- sense perceptions 50–51
- as source of Epicurean thought 508–509, 512–514
- on weight of atoms 73
- writings of 508
- see also* specific writings of
- poetics 347–376
  - Colotes 348, 355–357, 373
  - Demetrius Laco 349, 358–361, 373
  - Epicurus 349–353, 362
  - harmful elements of 350
  - literary critics, Epicureans as 370–372
  - Lucretius 366–370
  - Metrodorus 353–355, 373
  - Philodemus of Gadara 349, 361–368, 373, 389–390, 439–440
  - Zeno of Sidon 357–358, 369, 373
- poetry 350–353, 438–445
  - as deliberate falsehood 322–323
  - origin of 323–324
- Poggio Bracciolini 616, 620–622
- points, mathematical 64
- polemical laughter, against politicians 288–289
- Polignac, Melchior de 632, 658
- political rhetoric 339–340
- politicians
  - and pleasure 286–287
  - ridiculing of by Epicurus 288–289
  - successful, historically 299–300
  - use of by Epicurus 293–294
- politics and society 284–307, 525–526, 676, 699–704
  - the basics 284–292
  - blessings of Epicurean life 289–292
  - Cicero on 484
  - Epicureans in politics 301–304, 333
  - exceptions and qualifications 297–304
  - follies of a political career 285–289
  - good reputation in 296–297
  - legislation, respect for 295
  - a more nuanced perspective 292–297
  - past, view of 298–300
  - Plutarch on 523–526
  - the sage at royal court 300–301
  - and security, pursuit of 298–299
  - Seneca and 301–302, 496–497
  - usefulness of 294–295

*Politics of Friendship, The* (Derrida) 800  
Polyaenus 20, 112  
Polystratus 21–22, 317  
Pomponazzi, Pietro 633  
Pontifex, L. Calpurnius Piso 393, 395, 400, 403  
Posidonius 95, 481, 491  
postmodern Epicurus 791–808  
    defined 792  
    Hans Blumenberg 792–796  
    Jacques Derrida 796–800  
    Michel Serres 800–804  
poverty 370–371  
Praechter, Karl 487  
preconceptions 200–201  
    and belief 199, 200  
    formation of 314  
    of justice 315–316  
    language of 311–313, 322, 324, 325, 327  
    truth of 46–48, 52, 310–311  
    see also *prolepsis*  
premature death, fear of 134–135  
presentist hedonism 142  
Priestley, Joseph 656, 733, 734  
priests in Epicureanism 110–111  
primary qualities of atomism 76–77  
Prime Mover of Aristotle 98  
*Principes philosophiques sur la matière et al mouvement* (Diderot) 662  
principle of utility 747  
prison, politics as 287, 288  
Proclus 321, 519  
Prodicus 141, 171  
profligacy, denouncing 166, 178  
*prolepsis* 5, 46, 103–104, 360, 373, 694  
    of the gods 104–105, 107  
    of the good poet 356–357  
    see also *preconceptions*  
proofs and demonstrations 56  
prophecy 573, 587  
    oracular 540  
propositions of Epicureanism 756  
*proskynesis* 413  
Protarchus of Bargylia 22  
providence 109, 112, 573–575, 595–598  
prudence 168–169  
psychic pains 207, 211

psychological hedonism 147–149, 745–753, *see also* hedonism

psychology 189–220

  belief 199–203

  criticism of by Plutarch 514–515

  mechanistic 680–683, 685

  motivation 204–213

  self-development 213–218

  sense perception 194–199

  soul, mind and body 190–194

Puglia, Enzo 325, 412

Pulcher, Appius Claudius 397, 398, 401

punishment and virtue 180

Pyrrhus 286–287, 299, 508

Pythian Nome 359–360

quadrilemma of divine powers 109–110

*Quaestiones convivales* (Plutarch) 510

qualifying philosophy 298

Quintilian 335

Rabbeinu Yonah 555

Rabbinic literature and Epicureanism 549–581

  Amoraitic materials 552, 560–566

  Apiqoros in 551–553

  on Korach 563–566

  Maimonides 566–570

  Nachman of Breslov (Rabbi) 577–580

  physical theories of Epicurus in 571–576

  Tannaitic writings 552, 553–559

Radicati, Alberto 654, 655

rain, causes of 88

rainbow, causes of 89

Ranocchia, Graziano 416

Raphson, Joseph 654

rationalism and hedonism 153, 178

reason

  to control human nature 209–210

  and soul 193

  and Thomas Jefferson 732–733, 735

  use of to counteract fear 131

  as way to know the gods 106–107

*Reasons of Christian Religion, The* (Baxter) 647

*Recognitiones* (Rufinus) 603

reductionism 224

Reid, Thomas 743

religion

in *De rerum natura* (Lucretius) 432–433, 437, 442

of Descartes 648

of Thomas Jefferson 733–740

in Vergil 463–464

see also Christianity and Epicureanism; Rabbinic literature and Epicureanism

Renaissance scholars and Epicureanism 615, 616–618, 631–636

Lucretius' *De rerum natura* 615, 621–628, 631

replenishment and pleasure 159–160

*Republic* (Plato) 165, 478, 519, 524, 526

Thomas Jefferson on 733–734

virtue in 180

resistance and atomism 60

responsibility, see voluntary action and responsibility

restorative pleasures 156, 159, 174

resurrection

in Christianity 584, 652, 677, 735, 740

in Epicureanism 585, 596–597

in Rabbinic literature 553, 554

*Rêve de d'Alembert* (Diderot) 661, 662

Revolution, French 715–716, 722, 726

Rey, Roselyne 651

rhetoric 333–346

avoidance of 333–336, 344

early views of 334–336

Epicurean 341–344

Metrodorus writings on 19

Philodemus writings on 337–341

training in 336, 343

types of 337–341

written communication 341–342

Zeno of Sidon on 36, 144, 337

rhetorical puns 369

risk and pleasure 177

Rist, John 250, 487

Rochoux, Jean André 663–664

Roger, Jacques 660, 662

Roman Inquisition 631, 633–635

romantic love 433, 437, 461

Romeo, Constantina 360

Roskam, Geert 535

Ruffo, Fabrizio 391

Rufinus 603

Saad, Mariana 663

sage at royal court 300–301  
Sallust 447  
Sarasin, Jean-François 632  
*Satires* (Horace) 467–469  
Saturninus, Lucius Herennius 510, 519  
Sauron, Gilles 396  
Scarre, Geoffrey 758  
Scatozza, Höricht 398  
Schiesaro, Alessandro 449, 450  
Schmid, W. 349  
Schmidt, Johan Werner 656  
Schofield, M. 56  
Schopenhauer, Arthur 786–787  
scientific method 52–56, 190  
*Second Thoughts on Human Soul* (Coward) 653  
secondary qualities of atomism 76–77  
Sedley, David 189–190, 230, 316, 382–383, 438  
    on Lucretius 435, 436  
*Seelenheilung* 288, 289, 300  
self-development 213–218, 229–230  
    difference from atomic nature 217–218  
    first imprints 215–217  
    responsibility from oneself 216–217  
    training 218  
self-evident ideas  
    gods, existence of 103  
    pleasure as arbiter of moral truth 146  
self-preparation for sense perception 197  
self-preservation 684–686  
    ethics, happiness and 676–677, 686–692  
self-regarding nature of friendship 250–251, 254–275  
self-sufficiency 259–260, 291  
seminal fluid 645  
    the soul and 650  
Seneca 7  
    on death 501–502  
    on Epicurean thought 33–34, 619  
    on friendship 259–260, 495  
    human nature and the tactics of the therapist 500–505  
    knowledge, extent and provenance of 488–491  
    leisure and contemplation 496–497  
    literary ambitions of 499  
    maxims and meditation 497–500  
    on pain 502–503  
    physics and theology 491–492

- on politics 301–302, 496–497
- and theology 100, 589–590
- Thomas Jefferson and 730, 732
- virtue and pleasure 492–496
- see also* specific writings of
- sense perception 5, 194–199
  - and atomism 76–77
  - and belief 199
  - explanations of 50–51
  - and knowledge, in French thought 713
  - Marx on 773–774
  - scientific method and 52–53, 190
  - and the self-evident 103–104
  - self-preparation for 197
  - and the soul 191–193
  - Thomas Jefferson and 732
  - truth of 44–46, 48–50, 196
- Sententiae Vaticanae*, *see* *Vatican Sayings* (Epicurus)
- sentience
  - of atoms 649
  - principle of good and bad and 120, 123–125
- Serenus, Annaeus 489
- Serres, Michel 800–805
  - swerve, atomic 801, 802–803
- Sextus Empiricus
  - and atomism 66–67, 69–70
  - and epistemology 49–51, 53–54
  - and hedonism 148
  - on language 311, 312
  - poetry and 350
  - and theology 109
- Sextus Pompeius 389
- sexual intercourse 510, 544
- Shimon ben Zemach Duran (Rabbi) 556
- Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence* (Blumenberg) 792, 793–794, 796
- Sider, David 363–365, 388, 389, 468
- Sidgwick, Henry 743, 744–745
  - egoistic hedonism 755–756
  - on John Stuart Mill 749, 750, 753, 756
  - on pain, absence of 754–755
  - on pleasure 747, 748, 751–753
- sight
  - focused and unfocused 198, 199
  - of moving objects 198
  - nature of 195

- and the soul 192
- sign inferences 52, 54, 56
- silence of history on pleasure motivation 182–183
- simple fare, doctrine of 460–461, 470
- simulacra 103–104, 107, 586, 681, 685, 803
- Siro 30, 385, 386, 390, 457
- Sisyphus 433–434
- Smith, Martin 436, 531, 532, 537
  - on Diogenes fragments 543–546
- Snyder, H. Gregory 537
- Snyder, Jane McIntosh 369
- social contract 674–675
- social metaphor 449
- Socrates 733, 735–737, *see also* Plato
- song and the void 579
- sophistic rhetoric 337, 338–339
- Sosylos 388
- soul 119, 190–194
  - after death 77, 95, 118, 119
  - and body, relationship to 190–191
  - existence of 189
  - immortality of 599, 601–602, 652–653
  - language regarding, errors of 316
  - materialism and 650–656
  - nature of 55, 92, 189, 209, 210
  - Plato on 514–515
  - pleasures and pains of 205, 207
  - Stoics on 651–652, 654
- soul atoms 64, 119
- “soul of the soul” of Lucretius 191
- sovereignty vs. utility 704–706
- Speroni, Sperone 633–634
- spherical shape of cosmos 82
- Spinelli, Emidio 416
- Spinoza, Baruch 550, 642, 672
- spontaneous generation 662
- stars
  - divinity of the 89–90, 107–108
  - earthly vapors and 92
- start 266
- static pleasure 155
- Stoics 92, 417, 418, 714–715
  - apokatastasis of 585, 592
  - Cicero on 478
  - cosmology of 584–585



- death, fear of [502](#)
- early Christianity and [583–585](#), [589–590](#)
- on feelings and emotions [207](#), [208](#)
- friendships of [259](#), [260](#), [280](#), [479–480](#), [495](#)
- Horace on [467–470](#)
- modern Christianity and [671](#)
- on pleasure [494](#)
- Seneca on [495–497](#), [500](#), [505](#)
- on the soul [651–652](#), [654](#)
- Thomas Jefferson and [729–730](#), [732](#)
- Stowers, Stanley K. [565](#)
- Strato of Lampsacus [648](#)
- Stratonism [648](#)
- suicide [128](#), [129](#)
- sun
  - light of [91–92](#)
  - motion of [85](#), [91](#)
- sunbeam motion [242](#)
- superstition [101–102](#), [109](#), [515](#)
- swerve, atomic [72](#), [73](#), [75–76](#), [84](#), [212](#), [244–245](#), [436](#)
  - Cicero on [481](#)
  - Derrida on [798](#), [799](#), [805](#)
  - Diogenes of Oenoanda on [540–541](#)
  - Hegel on [765](#), [766](#)
  - Marx on [771–772](#)
  - multiple explanations of [246](#)
  - proof of existence of [240–243](#)
  - Serres on [801](#), [802–803](#)
  - voluntary action and responsibility [222–223](#), [236–243](#), [245–247](#)
- symmetry argument against fearing death [132](#)
- sympheron* [694](#)
- Syndikus, H. P. [466](#)
- synthēkē [694–695](#), [697](#)
- Système de la nature* (d'Holbach) [641](#), [662](#)
- Système d'Epicure* (La Mettrie) [658–660](#)
- systrophē [798](#)
  
- Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature* (Smith and Kerrigan) [797](#)
- Tannaitic literature [552](#), [553–559](#)
- tarachē* [439](#)
- technai* [354](#)
- temperance [169](#)
- Tepedino Guerra, Adele [383](#)
- Terror of the Natural Right, The* (Edelstein) [715](#)
- Tertullian [590](#), [595](#), [604](#)

Tescari, Onorato 348  
*tetrapharmakos* of Epicurus 119, 133  
     criticism of Epicurean hedonism 176, 179  
     psychic pain of 207  
 thanatology, *see* death  
*Theaetetus* (Plato) 46  
 thematic puns 369  
 theodicy 599  
 Theodoridas of Lindos 541  
 theology 94–117, 574–575, 589–590  
     ethics and 111, 112, 276  
 Theophrastus 414, 415  
*Theophrastus Redivivus* 655  
 Thomson's Lamp 63  
 "thrust" of attention 201, 203  
 Thucydides 434  
 thunder 87–88  
*Timaeus* (Plato) 18, 107, 436, 591, 592  
 Timagoras 36  
 Timasagoras 23, 36  
 time  
     Epicurean view of 61, 773  
     Marx on 773–774  
     observable events in relation to 56–57  
 Timocrates 32, 94, 292, 302  
     on rhetoric 342  
 Toland, John 653–655, 662  
 Torquatus, Cicero's Epicurean spokesman 144–145, 266, 270–272, 352  
     on egoism 483  
     on ethics 157  
     on friendship 263–267, 269  
     on happiness 182  
     and the hedonist calculus 149  
     on justice 265–266  
     on pleasure and pain 145–149, 169, 173, 175, 687  
*Tosefta* 554  
 touch, sense of 206  
*Traité de la Vie Éléante* (Balzac) 726  
 Traversari, Ambrogio 621  
*Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases* (Mandeville) 656  
*Treatise on the Memory of Epicurus and Others* (Philodemus) 408  
 tree trunk, description of Epicurus as 284, 292, 304  
*True Discourse* (Celsus) 596  
 trust, in friendships 260–261  
 truth, *see* epistemology

Tsouna, Voula 275–276, 419, 546  
*Tusculan Disputations* (Cicero) 477, 479, 503, 504

universalistic hedonism 751, 752–753, *see also* hedonism

universe

infinite nature of 70–71, 82–83

Marx on 775–777

motion in 84–87, 90–92

shape of 82

unnatural desires 164–165, 211–212

unnecessary desires 211

Usener, Hermann 252, 582, 594, 603

and the gods 586, 588, 589

utilitarianism 696, 730, 742–760

egoistic hedonism 755–757

hedonism, psychological vs. normative 745–753

pleasure and absence of pain 753–755

principles and goals of 744

*Utilitarianism* (Mill) 751

utility 696, 698

and sovereignty 704–706

Valgius 462–463

Valla, Lorenzo 619–620, 623, 628, 632

value, concept of 123–127, 129–130

van Giffen, Hubert 634–635

Varius Rufus, Lucius 414

Varro 482

*Vatican Sayings* (Epicurus) 17, 537

vector of atomic movement 72–74

Velleius 95

Vergil 3, 446, 456–475, 627

on *amor* 461–463

education of 457–458

religion in 463–464

*see also* specific writings of

Victorian England 742, 743, 757–758, *see also* utilitarianism

Villa of the Papyri 388–389, 391–403

construction of 391–392, 406

design of 391, 395–397, 400

Greek library of 403–421

owner of 392–402, 421

sculptures of 394–396, 398–400, 402–403

Virgil, *see* Vergil

virtue

and friendship 270, 271  
Horace on 471  
humanist view of 617–618  
and pleasure 141–142, 168–171, 179–180, 757  
Seneca on 494  
*Virtus* (Horace) 470–471  
vision, *see* sight  
*Vita Pyrrhonis* (Plutarch) 508  
void  
    argument for existence of 53, 54  
    atomism and 60–62, 201  
    and cosmology 90–91  
    geometrical description of 60  
    Hegel on 765  
    in Rabbinic literature 577, 578–579  
    resistance of concept of 62  
volition 212, 240–242, 244  
voluntary action and responsibility 221–249  
    swerve, atomic 222–223, 236–243, 245–247  
    swerve, atomic, modern views on 243–246  
*voluntas* 212, 240–242  
  
Warren, James 535  
Waszink, J. H. 349  
wealth 19  
    and pleasure 167  
weather, explanations for 87–89  
weight and atomism 60, 71–75  
well-being 118–119, 130, 134–135  
    criticism of Epicurean hedonism 174  
Willis, Thomas 650–653  
Wilson, Catherine 642, 649  
Wojcik, Maria Rita 396–399  
women, as students of Epicureanism 37, 544–545, 675  
Woolf, Raphael 470  
*Works on the Records of Epicurus and Some Others* (Philodemus) 420  
*World as Will and Representation, The* (Schopenhauer) 787  
  
Xenophon 415, 733, 736–737  
  
Yirmiyah ben Elazar (Rabbi) 563  
Yisrael ben Eliezer (Rabbi) 577  
  
Zeller, Eduard 487  
Zeno of Sidon 24, 25, 412, 476, 536

lectures of [381–382](#)  
library in the Villa of the Papyri [404](#)  
and Philodemus of Gadara, influence on [28, 29, 381–383](#)  
physical pleasures and [153](#)  
and poetics [357–358, 361, 369, 373](#)  
and rhetoric [36, 144, 337](#)  
Zeno's paradox [63, 65](#)